



Managing World Heritage: People-Nature-Culture Forum 2022

Background paper:

Understanding the services and benefits generated by heritage places in the context of sustainable development and climate change mitigation and adaptation

The *Managing World Heritage: People, Nature, Culture* (PNC) course is a flagship capacity-building activity of the World Heritage Leadership Programme (WHLP). Since its inception in 2015, PNC has been an important platform for testing new thinking and contributing to the development of new resources (e.g. the *Managing World Heritage* manual, the *Enhancing our Heritage Toolkit 2.0*, the *Guidance and Toolkit on Impact Assessment in the context of World Heritage* and the *Managing Disaster Risks for Building resilience of World Heritage* manual). These new resources advocate for integrated approaches to the conservation of natural and cultural heritage, promoting dialogue and synergy within conservation practices, under the premise that all heritage places hold varying degrees of both natural and cultural values.

The PNC course promotes an integrated approach to planning and management which incorporates the interactions of the World Heritage property with its buffer zone/s (if existent) and its wider setting – as required by paragraph 112 of the *Operational Guidelines* (UNESCO, 2021). It also calls for inclusive governance arrangements and decision-making processes that recognise the rights of Indigenous peoples, local communities and other rightsholders, that may have been neglected in the past. In addition, it fosters the understanding of the interconnections between the OUV and other important heritage values the property holds for people, at local or national levels. That is, it acknowledges that a World Heritage property may be valued by local communities, Indigenous peoples and other specific groups for reasons other than those that led to its inscription on the World Heritage List. These other important values are part of the richness of the property, and therefore must also be maintained, in an objective of good conservation practice (UNESCO et al., 2011).

However, how to assess those other important values and more specifically, what can be considered heritage values, raises several challenges. A recurrent theme discussed by participants of the PNC courses has been how heritage places can contribute to sustainable development, namely by identifying the services and benefits they generate to society. But in many situations discussions have remained at identifying economic benefits and income generation mostly attributed to the tourism industry, rather than being able to concretely address the diverse societal, environmental, and cultural benefits that heritage is contributing to. This has continuously highlighted the need to address the larger issues of services and benefits of heritage, and how that can be connected to heritage management. Economic value cannot be the only considered factor of how we make decisions on why people assign meaning to a place, why they consider it as heritage, and why they wish to maintain it for present and future generations.

The aim of this paper is to briefly elicit some of these challenges as a basis to promote discussion during the upcoming PNC Forum (to be held in the Republic of Korea, in September 2022) and inform ways to address it within the scope of the work undertaken by the WHLP.

How to distinguish between heritage values and ecosystems services and benefits?

Articles 1 and 2 of the World Heritage Convention define what heritage shall be considered as having Outstanding Universal Value, from the following points of view:

- a) history, art, science, history, ethnology and anthropology, in the case of cultural heritage; and
- b) aesthetics or natural beauty, science and conservation, in the case of natural heritage.

In both articles, there are no explicit references to economic valuation. However, these points of view are quite broad, requiring interpretation, particularly since the Convention was adopted half a century ago. Hence, the criteria for the assessment of Outstanding Universal Value, included in the Operational Guidelines, allow for heritage concepts to evolve over time. In their current version, these criteria do not include explicit references to the economic importance of heritage places.

Instead, the preamble of the Convention states that ‘the cultural heritage and the natural heritage are increasingly threatened with destruction not only by the traditional causes of decay, but also by changing social and economic conditions which aggravate the situation with even more formidable phenomena and damage and destruction (UNESCO 1972)’. Therefore, it can be assumed that, for the purposes of the Convention, the economic valuation of heritage places plays no role in the assessment of their Outstanding Universal Value.

With the objective of using the same terms consistently across the different resource materials being produced, the WHLP has embarked on the development of a glossary – particularly since these materials are to address both cultural and natural heritage. From early on, divergencies between the two fields were noted in relation to what may constitute heritage, how it is valued, and on the understanding of the concept of values.

Based on the definition used by English Heritage (2008) and in line with the analysis presented above on what constitutes heritage under the Convention, the term heritage was defined in the glossary as ‘All inherited resources which people value for reasons beyond mere utility’. Yet the concept of “ecosystem services”, used for over 20 years, brings an utilitarian perspective over nature and nature’s contributions to people. Hence the need to distinguish what the heritage values of a place are from the services and benefits generated by the existence and protection of that place to people.

By itself making this distinction in practice is challenging enough; and it is reinforced by the fact that cultural and spiritual values are often presented as part of ecosystem services and benefits provided by nature – as is the case in IUCN’s publication on *The Benefits of Natural World Heritage* (Osipova et al, 2014).

Should cultural values be considered ecosystem services?

In the Glossary of IPBES (Intergovernmental Panel on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services), ecosystem services are defined as ‘the benefits people obtain from ecosystems’ (IPBES N.D). In the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment (2005), ecosystem services can be divided into four main categories: supporting services, regulating services, provisioning services and cultural services.

The use of the term cultural services, and in particular the reference to cultural and spiritual values, brings about potential conflicts with the understanding of culture values in the field of cultural heritage. In the latter, values are socially constructed and therefore are extrinsic, since they assigned by humans to a place. In the field of nature conservation, nature is considered as having intrinsic value, that is, as having value in and of itself (Worboys et al, 2015). The recently published IPBES Assessment of the Diverse Values and Valuation of Nature (2022) proposes a broader framework for the assessment of nature’s values in which “specific values” are defined as

judgements regarding the importance of nature in particular contexts, grouped into *instrumental values* (i.e., means to a desired end often associated with a notion of ‘ecosystems services), *relational values* (i.e., the meaningfulness of human-nature interactions), and *intrinsic values* (i.e., independent of people as valuers) (IPBES 2022).

The publication acknowledges that the term ‘value conveys multiple ideas and that it is therefore challenging to define nature’s values in a way that can be accepted across cultures and academic traditions (ibid)’. It is important to note at this point that these approaches refer to concept of nature in general. Like a distinction is made between “culture” and “cultural heritage”, a similar distinction must be considered between “nature” and “natural heritage” and perhaps also with “nature conservation”. This is critical since not all nature is valued by humans equally. Invasive endemic species are not assigned the same value as endemic species, which questions the approach on the intrinsic value of nature.

By considering cultural values as part of ecosystem services there is a risk that a utilitarian approach is assigned to it and that they are not positioned on an equal stand of the so-called intrinsic values of nature. In places with both important natural and cultural values, this can undermine the recognition and protection of their cultural significance.

Therefore, taking these existing approaches into account and for the purposes of this Forum, services and benefits can be considered to be the advantages that flow to people and communities from the existence and protection of heritage: this can include economic and social benefits, as well as the services provided by healthy ecosystems such as regulation of climate, recreation, clean water, raw materials, food, shelter, mental well-being and health. Beyond utilitarian reasons, heritage places hold collective meaning for their local communities, for different nations, and for humanity as a whole. Therefore the primary goal of heritage conservation is/should be to ensure that those places continue to exist and that their values are maintained is providing a direct benefit (WHLP, forthcoming).

How to address social, economic, and environmental concerns without undermining heritage protection?

Increasingly, heritage conservation is seen 'as a means to a variety of social ends' (Avrami et al., 2019). Mason and Avrami argue that,

The contemporary conservation field is characterized by two distinct complementary perspectives on values: one centered on heritage values, the other on societal values. The conservation field is rooted in *heritage values*, the core historic, artistic, aesthetic, and scientific qualities and narratives that form the basis for the very existence of the heritage conservation field.... [The societal-value perspective] focuses on uses and functions of heritage places generated by a broad range of society-wide processes external to conservation... [and] foregrounds broader forces forming the contexts of heritage places as well as the non-heritage functions of heritage places – including economic development, political conflict and reconciliation, social justice and civil rights issues, or environmental degradation and conservation. The challenge of contemporary conservation theory is weaving together both perspectives (ibid).

Traditionally, heritage professionals have tended to see heritage conservation as an end in itself. However, the prevalence of economic thinking in society in the last decades have led the heritage field to accord increased importance to economic benefits and financing of heritage places – especially through the promotion of tourism. As the IPBES Assessment of the Diverse Values and Valuation of Nature (2022) asserts 'Predominant economic and political decisions have prioritized certain values of nature, particularly market based instrumental values, often at the expense of non-market instrument, relational and intrinsic values (IPBES 2022)'.

The contribution of heritage conservation to other societal outcomes is often made under the umbrella of its contribution to sustainable development. The *Policy Document for the Integration of a Sustainable Development Perspective into the Processes of the World Heritage Convention* calls upon State Parties

to recognise and promote the [World Heritage properties] inherent potential to contribute to all dimensions of sustainable development and work to harness the collective benefits for society, also by ensuring that their conservation and management strategies are aligned with broader sustainable development objectives. In this process, the properties' OUV should not be compromised (UNESCO 2015).

Yet, as exemplified by numerous State of Conservation Reports produced every year, ensuring such expectations is extremely challenging, needing a deeper reflection on integrating sustainable development principles in heritage management. Much has been debated and written about this topic but for the purpose of stimulating discussion during the PNC Forum, it would be important to re-examine SDG target 11.4 which aims to strengthen efforts to protect and safeguard the world's cultural and natural heritage. Could this target be interpreted to mean that protecting the existence of heritage is by itself contributing to sustainable development, independently of any other benefits the heritage may generate to society? After all, the indicator for measuring the application of this target is the total capital *expenditure* on the preservation, protection, and conservation of all cultural and natural

heritage by source of funding, type of heritage and level of government, not the *revenue* generated.

The first step for the sector to be better positioned to argue our contribution to the SDG while ensuring the conservation of heritage values, is perhaps to map the wider spectrum of services and benefits that diverse heritage places are providing to society in different contexts, and be able to present an open-ended structure to analyse both tangible, intangible and direct and indirect benefits that heritage places are providing/provide to society. This way allows to acknowledge that the services and benefits of heritage are broader than economic benefits or tourism income generation and these should be accounted for within various decision-making processes for heritage management.

The next question to be posed is understanding of who we mean by the concept of 'people'. When we consider the diverse ranges of services and benefits that heritage is providing to society, the issue of determining who the beneficiaries are, is important yet difficult to address. The flow of benefits can extend far beyond the limits or surrounding areas of the heritage place, for instance, the provision of water from the protection of a forest can be used by communities living many kilometres downstream for drinking, cooking, washing, framing/farming or generating electricity. Likewise, the revenues from guided tours to an urban area can mainly revert to a tourism operator located in another region or even another country.

Insights as to who are the beneficiaries is place-dependent, requiring additional data collection, studies and consultations. Including rights-holders and stakeholders from the beginning in services and benefits assessment is important to gather a detailed picture of the full range of associated beneficiaries at different levels. (WHLP, forthcoming)

How to accommodate various forms and stage of transformations of heritage in an era of climate change?

On the other hand, increasingly World Heritage places need to be protected from a rapidly growing threat, that is climate change. Using certain World Heritage places as carbon sinks for mitigation, and as places that can provide other types of environmental benefits is important, but the need of finding mechanisms for these places to adapt is urgent.

As more heritage places face impacts of climate change in varying degrees that they cannot possibly address at a site level, there is the need to find feasible ways to allow/ consider flexibility that allows for both the continuity of heritage values and the evolution of place meanings and societal benefits in face of climate change. Since different adaptation strategies can maintain or transform heritage values the concept of resilience can be operationalized as the ability for heritage values to recover (engineering and ecological disciplines) or transform (ecological discipline) following climate change impacts. However, this approach would need the heritage management system to be able to capture two distinct "learning from loss" moments: (a) in the aftermath of impacts that severely damage sites (b) through the proactive cultivation and transformation of heritage values that enables the discovery of future heritage values within rapidly changing sites (Seekamp et al, 2020).

The question remains on how adaptive our heritage management systems can be, to be able to record, document and accept the transformation processes that may be prompted by climate change impacts, and acknowledge the 'transformation of heritage values' in the future.

*** This paper has been collaboratively written by Maya Ishizawa, Leticia Leitao, Sarah Court, Nicole Franceschini and Eugene Jo.

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