World Heritage and sustainable development

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Rock-Hewn Churches, Lalibela (Ethiopia).

Tongariro National Park (New Zealand) symbolizes the spiritual links between the Maori community and the environment.
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1972 was an auspicious year for the 'disinherited'. A group of Amerindians occupied the Bureau of Indian Affairs and the Aboriginal Tent Embassy was set up on the lawn of Parliament House in Canberra; Rose Heilbron became the first woman judge at the Old Bailey in London, and the first Boston Marathon in which women were officially allowed to compete was held. And to cap it all, two interconnected events were to change the existing paradigm – the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment (Stockholm Conference), with the ensuing establishment of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the approval of the Convention concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage, 1972 (World Heritage Convention).

The Stockholm Conference agreed upon a Declaration concerning the environment and development, noting that 'the draft convention prepared by UNESCO concerning the protection of the world's natural and cultural heritage marks a significant step towards the protection, on an international scale, of the environment'. Indeed, it was Indira Gandhi's presence that gave the tone, underscoring the point that it was not just the balancing of the needs between generations but also the balancing of resources within her

generation, ensuring that the basic needs of humankind were met and reducing the disparity and inequality between different parts of the world, with special reference to older civilizations and women.

Equity was to be achieved through active citizen participation of the 'disinherited', including indigenous peoples, youth and women, and economic growth was the mechanism to sustain the development that was to provide for those human needs.

Neither of the original 1972 texts used the word sustainability, however, and it was only in 1980 that the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) World Conservation Strategy identified the need for long-term solutions and the integration of environmental and development objectives. It is this strategy that first coined the terminology 'development that is sustainable', stating:

'this is the kind of development that provides real improvements in the quality of human life and at the same time conserves the vitality and diversity of the Earth. The goal is development that will be sustainable. Today it may seem visionary but it is attainable. To more and more people it also appears our only rational option'.[1]

And it was the subsequent Brundtland definition on sustainable development[2] which is usually quoted with the first sentence but without the context of the two key concepts.

'Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. It contains within it two key concepts:
• the concept of *needs*, in particular the essential needs of the world's poor, to which overriding priority should be given; and
• the idea of *limitations* imposed by the state of technology and social organization on the environment's ability to meet present and future needs.'

Subsequently, the United Kingdom Government's response to the Brundtland report was published in 1998 (HMSO, 1994). One of the key arguments was that:

'There can be no quarrel with the [Brundtland principles] as a general definition. The key point is how to translate it into practice, how to measure it and to assess progress towards its achievement …'[3]

Sustainable development as a cultural construct implies that sustainability and development are not necessarily in conflict but might be integrated at least linguistically.[4] The term would thus provide a vehicle for a much-needed discourse. The resulting oxymoron or creative ambiguity was probably the best thing that happened to *sustainable development*, since the vagueness of the definition provided its power, in pursuing the discourse and its developing exegesis.

Nama people from the Richtersveld Cultural and Botanical Landscape (South Africa) have managed to preserve their traditions.
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Culture and development

For over a decade Amartya Sen, the Nobel Prize laureate, has been the champion for the interconnections between culture and development. He has shown that they are linked in a number of different ways, and that the connections relate both to the ends and to the means of development. In understanding these connections he identified two serious problems, that of variety and that of intricacy. However, rather than being defined as the problem they might be seen to provide the very essence of the richness that culture can bring to the table of development. Meanwhile, by defying classification and definition, the non-measurable elusive spirit becomes the devil in the development; the state of mind and feeling that is so essential to our well-being. Indeed Sen writes that 'there are good reasons to go beyond the taxonomy of different connections into critiques of particular theses and suppositions.[5] Cultural assets and diversity in the 2010 UN Resolution on Culture and Development[6] are the vehicle for sustainable development, being underscored by 'acknowledging that culture is a source of enrichment and an important contributor to the sustainable development of local communities, peoples and nations, empowering them to play an active and unique role in development initiatives'. In furthering these objectives, the World Heritage Convention is a major player in bringing this symbiotic

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relationship to the debate by way of expert meetings on sustainable development and by effectively confronting these issues through state of conservation reports.

It could be said that the World Heritage Convention is in itself the epitome of sustainability. Nevertheless the word crept in unnoticed in 1992, with the adoption of paragraph 38 of the *Operational Guidelines* defining cultural landscapes, combining the works of nature and man, and often reflecting 'specific techniques of sustainable land-use'. It was also deemed that the protection of cultural landscapes could contribute to the modern techniques of sustainable land-use and maintain or enhance the natural values.

In 2002, the Budapest Declaration on World Heritage[7] developed the Strategic Objectives of the '4 Cs' – *Credibility*, effective *Conservation* and *Capacity-building* and increased public awareness through *Communication*. The Declaration opened with the bold statement

'We, the members of the World Heritage Committee, recognize the universality of the 1972 Convention concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage and the consequent need

to ensure that it applies to heritage in all its diversity, as an instrument for the sustainable development of all societies through dialogue and mutual understanding;'

Then in 2005 changes to the *Operational Guidelines* began to take on board the idea of sustainable development with paragraph 6 added as part of the introduction:

'6. Since the adoption of the Convention in 1972, the international community has embraced the concept of "sustainable development". The protection and conservation of the natural and cultural heritage are a significant contribution to sustainable development.'

The Strategic Action Plan for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention 2012–2022 was adopted at the 18th session of the General Assembly of States Parties:

1. Our Vision for 2022
International cooperation and shared responsibility through the World Heritage Convention ensures effective conservation of our common cultural and natural heritage, nurtures respect and understanding among the world's communities and cultures, and contributes to their sustainable development.

Cultural Landscape of Bali Province: the *Subak* System as a Manifestation of the *Tri Hita Karana* Philosophy (Indonesia).
© Ministry of Education and Culture of Indonesia

Interconnecting systems

Following on from previous years, the World Heritage Committee at its 33rd session in Seville (2009), debated the World Heritage Convention and the main multilateral environmental[8] agreements within the provisions of the *Operational Guidelines* in paragraphs 41–44. It adopted two critical decisions requesting:

'that the concept of sustainable development be emphasized and taken in due consideration in all relevant actions taken by the World Heritage Centre;'

and that

'the World Heritage Centre continues the cooperation with the secretariats of other multilateral environmental agreements through the Biodiversity Liaison Group and other mechanisms, including bilateral cooperation to enhance synergies and coherence;'

The debate on World Heritage Convention and sustainable development at the 34th session in Brasilia (2010),[9] highlighted the connectivity to other mechanisms and the delegate of Sweden related it to the three pillars of sustainability:

'Regarding the definition of sustainable development, we do not see a need for adding a cultural dimension, the standard definition of sustainable development with its three dimensions is based on the Brundtland Commission and the Johannesburg Declaration. It is well known and widely used. The cultural aspect of sustainability and the role of heritage need to be articulated but we should not complicate it by introducing something that is already there.

Our understanding of the concept is that the cultural dimension is already included, since it has been covered by the social and environmental dimensions. Culture is what we, as social beings, do in and with the environment. This view is based on a wider interpretation of what is included in the concept of environment. Our experience is that it is wiser and more fruitful to argue from within the discourse of the established definition.'

The final decision[10] included the considerations of sustainable development and yet again led to the revision of the *Operational Guidelines*. Towards the 40th anniversary of the Convention, celebrating World Heritage and Sustainable Development: the Role of Communities, the consultative meeting in Ouro Preto (Brazil, February 2012) collated the relevant texts in a comprehensive document with wide-ranging conclusions.

World Heritage Committee

In conclusion, a cursory look at the summary records and decisions of the World Heritage Committee shows a developing trend. The 24th session (2000, Cairns, Australia) had five references to sustainability but no reference to sustainable development, while the 31st session (2007, Christchurch, New Zealand), contained nineteen references to sustainability including five specifically to sustainable development. The 35th session (Paris, 2011) had seventy-one references to sustainability and nine specific references to sustainable development. The Committee has indeed taken on board sustainable development, but unfortunately, with the rapid rotation of members, much institutional memory is lost and many decisions and phraseologies are simply regurgitated, while the pragmatic piecemeal approach and incremental changes have now reached a stage at which a metamorphosis appears necessary. The Ouro Preto recommendation to come up with a policy guideline document that would integrate a concern for sustainable development within the operational processes is a step in the right direction.

Traditional *macuti* architecture on the Island of Mozambique.
© Peter Hess

Sustainable tourism

A major impetus to sustainability has been the economic engine of tourism, initiated in 2008. In 2011 the World Heritage Centre embarked on developing a new World Heritage and Sustainable Tourism Programme.[11] The aim was to create an international framework for the cooperative and coordinated achievement of shared and sustainable outcomes relating to tourism at World Heritage properties.

Heritage in all its forms needs to be managed in a sustainable way if it is to make an enduring contribution to society. The term sustainable tourism suggests that tourism must be sustained – and this means sustainable livelihoods

According to Geoffrey Wall of the Department of Geography at Canada's University of Waterloo, 'If tourism is to be sustainable, it will be necessary to devise a typology of tourism which will permit the matching of tourism types to resource capabilities. Wall uses Bali's Sustainable Development Project of 1991 to devise a tourism typology for the island based on four elements: attraction type, location, spatial characteristics, and development status.[12]

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The Bali Sustainable Development Project adopted three principles: continuity of natural resources, development to enhance the quality of life and continuity of culture. If a fishing community is no longer able to sustain itself through fishing but successfully turns to tourism to achieve its well-being, despite changing lifestyles, should this be viewed positively or negatively from a sustainable development perspective? And how will this impact on the values of the property?

Sustainable tourism should uphold the culture and environment of the host community, its economy, and its traditional lifestyle, indigenous behaviour, and patterns of local and political leadership. Local people should be involved in planning and approval. There should be a just distribution of the costs and benefits, including effects – positive and negative – on future generations.

As the delegate from Bahrain noted in Brasilia:

'… we have noticed that many of the natural sites are on the List of World Heritage in Danger as a result of activities like hunting, fishing, poaching, uncontrolled agriculture, wood cutting or irresponsible tourism. The question is how to change the way of life and help local communities to adopt alternative activities which are profitable and sustainable. How we can, through a suitable management plan and involving communities, help them to adopt concepts like the economic value of a living elephant or a living rhinoceros, or that a whale is a more profitable and sustainable revenue for the community than a killed animal. How we can change the attitude of hunters to become ecotour guides.'

The Committee session in Seville in 2009 flagged two properties for sustainable development in their debate on the state of conservation – the Rock-Hewn Churches, Lalibela (Ethiopia) and the *macuti* (straw)

Shushtar Historical Hydraulic System (Islamic Republic of Iran).
© Rob Verhoeven

town on the Island of Mozambique. In the case of Lalibela, the Committee requested that the State Party should

'establish a management plan for the property, integrating the Conservation action plan, the measures for sustainable development involving local populations and the touristic enhancement of the property';

and while debating the situation on the Island of Mozambique, it expressed its concern

'at the lack of sewage and water systems, particularly in Macuti town, and the lack of appropriate urban planning, rehabilitation and improvement of traditional Macuti houses, including the development of a sustainable way forward, and urged the State Party to work towards a sustainable development plan for Macuti town'.

The heritage of water

But of all the World Heritage properties that can show how sustainability is an essential cultural component and a way of life are those harnessing water. The Bahraini delegate in the debate on sustainable development said that we

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might learn from traditional practices throughout the world, but

'a sustainable way of using natural resources by local communities in the Arab region for hundreds of years is known as *Hima*. This local practice allows local communities or tribes to manage and share natural resources in a sustainable manner to secure the need of the present and future generations, whether it is in arranged land, forest or even using water resources.'

A good example of a World Heritage site depending on the principle of *Hima* is the *Aflaj* Irrigation Systems of Oman; the Committee in Seville, in 2009, noted that the local community was working towards sustainable management.

At the same session, the Shushtar Historical Hydraulic System (Islamic Republic of Iran), was inscribed on the World Heritage List, 'as a technical culture of eighteen centuries serving sustainable development'.

The *Subak* System as a Manifestation of the *Tri Hita Karana* Philosophy was inscribed at the Saint Petersburg Committee session in 2012. The agricultural areas are all still farmed in a sustainable way by local communities and their water supplies are democratically managed by the water temples. But this Cultural Landscape of Bali Province (Indonesia) is only part of a wider story that will need to provide support to sustain the traditional systems yet offer benefits allowing the farmers to stay on the land.

Our cities

The built heritage and the role of the city is surely the main application for the debate on sustainable development. This was highlighted in the issues that sparked The Vienna Memorandum.[13] While the text did not make specific mention of sustainable development, it did highlight sustainability:

'5. Desiring that the Vienna Memorandum be seen, within the continuum of these afore-mentioned documents and the current debate on the sustainable conservation of monuments and sites, as a key statement for an integrated approach linking contemporary architecture, sustainable urban development and landscape integrity based on existing historic patterns, building stock and context.'

Cultural heritage for the sustainable city has become a critical integrative component. Indeed the fierce debate on the Historic Urban Landscape approach is only another indication as to how far we might stretch the issue of sustainability.

During the debate at the 32nd session in Quebec (Canada, 2008), 'ICOMOS specifically highlighted the need for sustainable development to sustain Outstanding Universal Value and deliver much needed social and economic benefits in preventing further threats to the properties. Concerning the issue of infrastructural development, the high-rise buildings and their impact on important views and visual integrity was pointed out. In this regard the threat of wind farms was for the first time brought to

the attention of the Committee as a major theme which would need joint analysis for both cultural and natural heritage.'

The outcome in the form of the Recommendation on the Historic
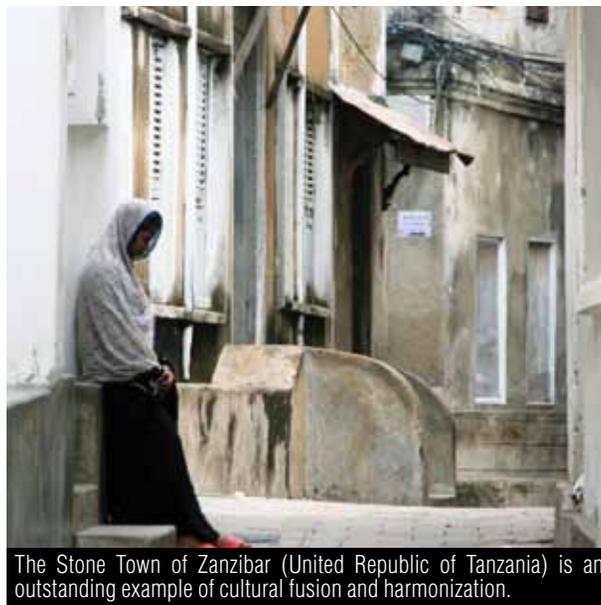
The Stone Town of Zanzibar (United Republic of Tanzania) is an outstanding example of cultural fusion and harmonization.
© Marc Veraart

Urban Landscape[14] already showed that sustainability was a keyword in the approach; sustainable development being quoted nine times within eighteen mentions of sustainability. The definition is given:

'5. This Recommendation addresses the need to better integrate and frame urban heritage conservation strategies within the larger goals of overall sustainable development, in order to support public and private actions aimed at preserving and enhancing the quality of the human environment. It suggests a landscape approach for identifying, conserving and managing historic areas within their broader urban contexts, by considering the interrelationships of their physical forms, their spatial organization and connection, their natural features and settings, and their social, cultural and economic values.'

The future for sustainability is to be sought in the integrative approach for culture and development. The words of Indira Gandhi of 1972 ring true today:

'The inherent conflict is not between conservation and development, but between environment and reckless exploitation of man and earth in the name of efficiency... We see that however much man hankers after material goods, they can never give him full satisfaction. Thus the higher standard of living must be achieved without alienating people from their heritage and without despoiling nature of its beauty, freshness and purity so essential to our lives.'

Notes

[1] World Conservation Strategy, 1980, IUCN/UNEP/WWF.
[2] The World Commission on Environment and Development was initiated by the General Assembly of the United Nations in 1982, and its report, *Our Common Future*, was published in 1987 (http://habitat.igc.org/open-gates/wced-ocf.htm).
[3] Charlotte Kelly, *Origins of Sustainability*, Institute for Transport Studies, University of Leeds, UK.
[4] Braden R. Allenby, 2004, Engineering and ethics for an anthropogenic planet, in *Emerging Technologies and Ethical Issues in Engineering*: Papers from a Workshop, October 14-15, 2003, Washington DC, National Academies Press, pp. 9–28.
[5] Paper presented to the World Bank Tokyo meeting, 13 December 2000.
[6] Resolution adopted by the General Assembly [on the report of the Second Committee (A/65/438)] 65/166. Culture and Development – 20 December 2010.
[7] The Budapest Declaration is accessible at http://whc.unesco.org/uploads/activities/documents/activity-562-4.pdf.
[8] Decision: 33 COM 5C, Document WHC-09/33.COM/5C.
[9] WHC-10/34.COM/INF.20.
[10] 34COM 5D, World Heritage Convention and sustainable development.
[11] Decision 34COM 5D.
[12] G. Wall, 2009, Tourism and development: towards sustainable outcomes, in L. Fusco Girard and P. Nijkamp, *Cultural Tourism and Sustainable Local Development*, London, Ashgate Publishing, pp. 31–46.
[13] The World Heritage Centre in cooperation with the City of Vienna and ICOMOS organized the international conference, World Heritage and Contemporary Architecture – Managing the Historic Urban Landscape, which took place in Vienna (Austria) from 12 to 14 May 2005 and was hosted by the Austrian Government.
[14] Approved by UNESCO General Conference on 10 November 2011.