World Heritage, Sustainable Development, and Civil Society

An Action Plan (January 2019)

The workshop on **World Heritage, Sustainable Development, and Civil Society** saw the gathering of 50 civil society actors from all over the world. The aim was to find innovative ways for civil society actors to implement the UNESCO's 2015 Policy on the Integration of a Sustainable Development Perspective into the Processes of the World Heritage Convention. This workshop was part of the official programme of the European Year of Cultural Heritage. It was organised in cooperation with Europa Nostra, and with generous funding from the European Cultural Foundation and the University of Kent. It took place on 29th March 2018 at the Brussels School of International Studies, University of Kent.

Civil society actors are defined as individuals or community groups, distinct from governments and businesses, who have a common interest in World Heritage and/or the collective good. Examples include concerned citizens, volunteers and professionals, researchers, non-governmental organizations, non-profit organizations and other associated groups. Civil society actors often play a key role in the management of World Heritage sites.

The Workshop made several recommendations targeted at civil society actors, to facilitate their participation in the implementation of the 2015 Policy and the wider UN Sustainable Development Goals[1].

General provisions

- Civil society actors can use the methods that they deem appropriate to support the implementation of the policy by undertaking activities such as advocacy, lobbying, awareness raising, establishing partnerships, public assemblies, training, and research programs.
- Clustering and networking should be encouraged among civil society actors, for peer-learning and collaboration, to exchange and share knowledge and ideas, and to have stronger voices within governance systems.
- Effective participation of civil society actors will be facilitated by user-friendly explanations of the World Heritage system, its terminology, and its operational guidelines.
- Implementation of the policy would be facilitated by a set of sustainability indicators for monitoring the performance of World Heritage properties.
- Best practice in participatory approaches for the implementation of the policy should be recorded and promoted.
- Capacity-building opportunities that support longer-term World Heritage and Sustainable Development Goals should be regularly offered to civil society actors.
- Civil society organisations might attempt to acquire a legally recognised status, so that they may more easily implement the policy.

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[1] See also the ICOMOS Action Plan for Localizing the SDGs:
https://www.icomos.org/images/DOCUMENTS/Secretariat/2017/ICOMOS_Action_Plan_Cult_Heritage_and_Localizing_SDGs_20170721.pdf

Dimensions of sustainable development

Environmental Sustainability

To protect biological and cultural diversity and ecosystem services and benefits, civil society actors should:
- Demonstrate the environmental benefits of protecting the intangible and tangible values associated with World Heritage properties.
- Identify risks to heritage values and to the living conditions of local communities through mechanisms such as holistic risk assessment and strategic environmental impact assessment.
- Develop tools for communicating what communities will gain from adopting a holistic approach that includes sustainable consumption and production patterns and the use of renewable energy resources.
- Promote territorial planning approaches going beyond core and buffer zones. This would include land use and transport as well as strategic planning.
- Take measures for environmental sustainability, for example through communication, subsidies, and awards.

To strengthen resilience to natural hazards and climate change, civil society actors should:
- Develop tools and principles that streamline the decision-making process for post-disaster recovery of cultural heritage, that takes into consideration the protection of human lives as the priority, for example through vulnerability reduction and capacity-building.
- Use traditional knowledge for innovative disaster mitigation, resilience, and coping mechanisms.
- Develop awareness and education programs on disaster risk management and thereby build resilience.

Inclusive Social Development

To contribute to inclusion and equity, civil society actors should:
- Develop educational practices and activities, both inside and outside of the classroom, which are focused on an appreciation of cultural diversity and local cultural and environmental knowledge.
- Encourage the use of social media for debates on values and cultural rights at World Heritage properties.
- Encourage networking and the exchange of expertise through independent online fora/platforms for civil society organizations.

To enhance quality of life and well-being, civil society actors should:
- Develop and promote 'certifying' mechanisms to give the private sector incentives to implement sustainable development principles and improve quality of life for local communities.
- Promote stronger cooperation between different programmes (e.g. between World Heritage and the Man and the Biosphere Programme).

- Develop user-friendly publications and guidelines on alternative options to infrastructure development at World Heritage properties, using for example SWOT analyses.
- Ensure that social impact assessments become part of Environmental and Cultural Heritage Impact Assessments.

To respect, protect and promote human rights, civil society actors should:
- Implement a human rights-based approach to heritage management.
- Promote best practices on human rights-based approach at World Heritage properties.
- Publish human rights violation perpetuated at World Heritage properties.
- Organise events in partnership with States Parties and other concerned stakeholders on human rights issues.

To respect, consult and involve indigenous peoples and local communities, civil society actors should:
- Encourage the greater use of participatory methodologies in World Heritage processes, including conflict-resolution mechanisms.
- Develop user-friendly guides on World Heritage processes, making them more accessible for non-specialists.
- Develop activities to help local communities become more actively involved in heritage management.
- Publish best practice guidelines on successful heritage management collaborations.
- Develop mechanisms for assessing how effectively local communities and indigenous populations have been involved in the preparation of nomination dossiers.

To achieve gender equality, civil society actors should
- Identify practices considered discriminatory by local communities and find alternative approaches.
- Increase awareness of the importance of non-discrimination at properties where discrimination and exclusion might be part of traditional culture.
- Ensure the diverse composition of any decision-making, advisory, or independent expert groups to ensure the representation of all segments of societies, particularly women.
- Research and make visible the lives of important women who may have been previously overlooked.

Inclusive Economic Development

To ensure growth, employment, income and livelihoods, civil society actors should:
- Promote alternative financial mechanisms that embrace the principles of sustainable development, including but not limited to: crowdfunding; micro-financing; local cooperatives; and match-funding.
- Diversify funding sources that respect sustainable criteria, ensuring easy access to funding for all.
- Develop local small and medium-sized enterprises and craftsmanship to help foster inclusive local economic development.

- Encourage best practice relating to a circular economy based on sharing and cooperation, helping to enhance sustainable livelihoods.

To promote economic investment and quality tourism, civil society actors should:
- Encourage responsible tourism behaviors, using for example innovative digital tools, local expertise, and psychological techniques.
- Introduce management mechanisms and innovative ICT tools for limiting mass tourism.
- Associate the World Heritage label with other labels of quality, promoting these labels online to ensure adequate visitor management.
- Spread the benefits of tourism to local communities through schemes such as diffused accommodation, slow tourism, and eco-tourism.
- Develop sustainable economic activities that combine local craftmanship with design and innovation.
- Guarantee a participatory approach with local communities, the real owners of their heritage.

To strengthen capacity-building, innovation and local entrepreneurship, civil society actors should:
- Advocate for the reduction of the digital divide, through capacity-building programs.
- Develop peer-learning exchanges, twinning, and teacher training on topics such as local entrepreneurship and successful funding applications.
- Develop south-south and north-south cooperation.
- Improve the mobility of site managers so that they can learn about sustainability approaches from each other.
- Encourage youth engagement, to promote opportunities for innovation and local entrepreneurship.

Fostering Peace and Security

To ensure conflict prevention, civil society actors should:
- Create educational schemes to raise awareness of the importance of tangible and intangible culture and their central role in creating shared identities.
- Develop local expertise in cross culturally sensitive approaches to heritage.
- Develop multiple and cross state interpretations at transboundary/transnational heritage properties.
- Establish a UNESCO curriculum, where historical interpretations from around the world are able to supplement national curricula, thereby showing children how history can be manipulated for political purposes.
- Create exhibits at World Heritage visitor centres that depict the consequences of destroying heritage and looting cultural artefacts.

To protect heritage during conflict, civil society actors should:
- Establish contact points at World Heritage properties to provide training programmes that empower local communities and fight against looting and trafficking of cultural artefacts, including safe (if necessary anonymous) ways to report such activities.

- Raise awareness and create pressure in the international community to resolve conflicts and condemn the destruction of cultural heritage properties.
- Use (safe or non-target) World Heritage properties as meeting points to bring professionals and communities together to inform and support each other in times of conflict.
- Build the capacity for dealing with endangered heritage and heritage destruction.

To promote conflict resolution, civil society actors should:
- Ensure multiple interpretations through participatory approaches, ensuring that no voices are silenced.
- Promote dialogue-oriented projects to ensure that tensions between conflicting parties can be resolved peacefully.
- Encourage positive attempts to reconcile historical conflicts, providing a foundation upon which the youth can build for the future.

To contribute to post-conflict recovery, civil society actors should:
- Encourage exploring and discussing identity markers that promote commonalities and transcend divisions.
- Create dialogue-oriented schemes as a means of empowering local communities and overcoming the pain caused by conflict.
- Encourage consultations to determine whether local communities would like to reconstruct certain properties, demolish them, or leave them untouched until a clear consensus is reached.
- Promote creativity in the recovery process, including though the use of shared popular culture, to create new identities and shared memories.
- Ensure that personal stories are included in interpretations of contested heritage properties, as they are important for encouraging visitors to have empathy towards local heritage narratives.