THE RELEVANCE OF URBAN CONSERVATION CHARTERS IN THE WORLD HERITAGE CITIES IN THE ARAB STATES

Eman Assi⁑

Abstract

In developing countries, the world heritage status has not brought great wealth or prosperity to its communities. It is the large investor who benefit, while local resident become a mute spectator. As we valorize the heritage, there is less and less scope for the community to determine its future. World heritage sites, are governed by rules, regulation and managements tools, and seem increasingly to disconnect people from their heritage. When we prepare charters, plans, guide books and documentation that define boundaries to preserve the past, we must remind ourselves that we function in a society that is vibrant and kinetic, whose survival is dependant on the past, but on coping with present.

This paper addresses the complexity of the world heritage phenomenon and its applicability on heritage sites in developing countries. This paper articulates the complexity of inscription of a world heritage site in and its implication on human aspect. The city of Petra in Jordan and Fez in Morocco were brought as examples to discuss the aspect of social context in a world heritage sites. Issues of gentrification/tourisitification, universal / local were discussed here. The main concern is; the empowerment of local communities living in heritage cities; the strengthening of their role in heritage management as well as in the management of tourism activities generated by heritage and the integration of tourism in urban cultural and social life as well as economic prosperity.

Key words: world heritage cities, urban conservation, Heritage tourism, global-local issues

1. Introduction

Of the conventions of UNESCO, the World Heritage Convention is the most important in the field of heritage protection. Having involved nearly all states of the world, it has also become a platform for debating the concepts and policies related to conservation. For sites to qualify to the World Heritage List they need to satisfy at least one of ten criteria as well as to meet the conditions of authenticity and integrity, in short, to have "outstanding universal value". In order to meet these requirements, one should approach the question as a process, identifying the relevant themes of universal nature such as, spirituality, defense, utilization of resources, to verify the representivity in the pertinent cultural-historical context, and prepare and guarantee a management system and plan for the nominated resource.

In relation to cultural heritage the idea of universal nature can be seen in the authentic creative expressions of specific cultures (Beck,2006). Jokilehto agreed that

---

⁑ University of Sharjah.

cultural heritage of humanity can be perceived to form its own universe, which is qualified by individual cultures and their products (Jokilehto, 2006). As part of this human universe, a heritage resource will obtain "universal value" so far as it is a true and authentic expression of a particular culture (Aplin, 2002). In relation to World Heritage, "outstanding" can be interpreted as: the best and/or most representative example or examples of a kind of heritage. Article 1 from the World Heritage Convention sets the requirement of outstanding universal value from the point of view of history, art or science when dealing with monuments or groups of buildings, and from the historical, aesthetic, ethnological or anthropological points of view when the question is about sites. The participants of the Global Strategy Natural and Cultural Heritage Expert Meeting, in Amsterdam in 1998, also gave the following definition to "outstanding universal value":

"The requirement of outstanding universal value should be interpreted as an outstanding response to issues of universal nature common to or addressed by all human cultures". [1]

Such responses will have different forms in the different cultural, social, political, economic and physical contexts, resulting in cultural diversity. In fact, UNESCO has given great prominence to this concept in its Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity (2001). *Article 1* of the declaration defines cultural diversity as the common heritage of humanity:

"Culture takes diverse forms across time and space. This diversity is embodied in the uniqueness and plurality of the identities of the groups and societies making up humankind. "

2. The Nature of the World Heritage

World Heritage Sites are, by UNESCO definition, exceptional heritage places. The UNESCO children's guide says *"… all the treasures included on the World Heritage List must be unique, irreplaceable and authentic",* (Buckley, 2002). The formal definition of World Heritage cultural places is that they must be of 'outstanding universal value', (Buckley, 2004). In short, World Heritage places are unusual because they claim 'universal' significance, which transcends national identities. World Heritage is, therefore, of a different nature to sites of local significance, despite being managed and promoted by individual state governments. Inscription of places under the World Heritage Convention recognizes that there may be a global heritage 'for whose protection it is the duty of the international community as a whole to cooperate (Dann, 1999). Such places might be expected to have this heritage presented in ways which bring out global values. Cultural World Heritage Sites are of three types, namely monuments, groups of buildings, and sites, including cultural landscapes, where 'nature/culture interactions are deeply anchored and extensive'. By 2004 there were 788 places on the World Heritage List, more than two-thirds (611) cultural sites.

Before discussing the challenges marking the conservation of world heritage sites, one needs to question the very concept of 'outstanding universal significance' as it dictates the future protection and management of the historic resource. Though a prerequisite for inclusion on the list is required, this notion has recently faced criticism from various sections around the world, (Beck, 2006). The ideal mix of nature and culture preferred by conservationists around the globe is best summarized in the following words of Gifford Pinchot, first Director of the U.S. Forest Service, 'The purpose of conservation: The greatest good to the greatest number of people for the longest time.'

---

[1] Report, B. v. Droste et al. (eds.), Amsterdam 1998, p. 221)

3. The Arab world and the World heritage list

There are currently 830 World Heritage Sites located in 138 State Parties. Of these, 644 are cultural, 162 are natural and 24 are mixed properties. Currently 65 world heritage sites located in the 15 Arabic states parties leaving 4 countries (Saudi Arabia Kuwait, UAE and Qatar without any   inscribed sites.

The Arab states consisting of 19 countries with combine population of 325 million people, and spanning two continents, it is the largest geo-linguistic unit in the world after Russia. Some Arab countries have substantial reserves of petroleum. The Gulf is particularly well-furnished: four Gulf States, Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Kuwait, and Qatar, are among the top ten oil or gas exporters worldwide. According to UNESCO, the average rate of adult literacy (ages 15 and older) in this region is 66%, and this is one of the lowest rates in the world. In Mauritania, Morocco, and Yemen, the rate is lower than the average, at barely over 50 %. On the other hand, Kuwait and Palestine record a high adult literacy rate of over 90%. There is unequal distribution of wealth among Arab countries. Although Qatar considered being the second rich country in the world with the highest GDP per capita in the Middle East, there are many Arab countries below the poverty line, or having many debts such as Jordan, Egypt and Morocco.

%	Total	Mixed	Cultural	Natural	Zone
9%	74	3	38	33	**Africa**
7%	62	1	58	3	**Arab States**
21%	182	11	126	45	**Asia-Pacific**
49%	416	7	358	51	**Europe** & **North America**
14%	117	3	80	34	**Latin America** & **Caribbean**

Fig 1 WH sit: es according to these zones and their classification, Source WH centre ,UNESCO website

The table above reflects some level of significant under-representation of heritage sites in the Arab world. An issue that UNESCO is currently working on it resulted that 16 heritage sites were inscribed at world heritage list after 2000. Thus range of types of heritage places makes up the World Heritage List, implying a range of management and interpretation strategies for World Heritage Sites. The presentation of heritage places will vary with the nature of the heritage items and with the kinds of importance they are assigned. While World Heritage Sites are similar in their overall significance, there will be different management strategies for each individual site. Even in a single country and among different countries,   there can be huge differences in the management arrangements between individual World Heritage places. This can easily lead to situations where 'not all World Heritage areas are created equal', as claimed by Lane and McDonald (Hall, C. M. and Piggin, R. 2001). However, the promotion of World Heritage could link the global significance with significance of individual sites.

Orbasly on the other hand sees that conservation charter, although international in name, are predominantly generated in Europe and by Europeans, *and do not fully* respond to culturally differences and social realities nor they can supported by the economies of many developing countries. For many places it is simply not economically possible to retain an entire stock of urban heritage (Orbasly, 2000). And this case is applied to world heritage cities in the Arab world where major issues facing conservation in general and urban conservation in particular are that; urban growth can be phenomenal where urban resources are limited and under greater demand, national or local budgets rarely stretch to urban conservation and aesthetic and cultural appreciation of the historic environment can be different than in the West.

Image 1: the Madinat Fez, Moroco

Or, quite simply, the lack of resources prevents certain courtiers in the Arab world from compiling the nomination file required to have their heritage recognized. And when, in order to ensure fairer representation, new categories of heritage are identified, such as cultural landscapes or cultural routes, it is again the countries with the necessary resources that are the first to submit nomination files.

Recognition of historic quarters with view to preserving their qualities or rehabilitating them is a very new concept for many cash-starved governments and local authorities (Erlet, 1991). In Fez for example, these issues involved in monumental and historic conservation are not strictly speaking those of preserving inner-city neighborhood for their residents, (Hewison, R. (Uzzell, D. ed.), 1989). Priorities have often been politically driven and architectural and historic concern achieved through eviction, demolition and disruption to the existing patterns of life and informal economy, (Habitat 1984). Funding for conservation can become a low priority when there are pressing demands on budget for the better sanitation, healthcare and schools.

Conservation programs in developing countries, with pressing demands and low budgets, must be able to consider a more pragmatic approach responding careful assessment of priorities(Al-Asad and Serageldin, 1997). It is more important to provide bathrooms, if this is the required standard, than preferred facades which inhabitants are unable to maintain or afford to live behind. Religion, too, continues to play a role in urban life and has a presence in urban morphology and spatial use.

Very frequently, the main motive behind the development of a site -and even its inclusion in the World Heritage List- is to promote tourism, with economic imperatives that neglect good conservation principles (Dower, 1974). Buffer zones, traditional urban

areas, or the natural environment around protected sites are being altered completely by economic pressure, especially in developing countries (Hitchcock, M., 2004). For example, setting up a conservation policy for Fez has required more than three decades of sound research, experimentation, and implementation of pilot projects in order to crystallize a practical strategy for approaching this complex and intricate urban site. The local expertise that each historic site needs to develop was considered necessary to maintain the course of action, the harmony of the whole, ensure grass roots approach, and avoid applying imported 'ready-magic' strategies. Those 'magic' strategies, often immature, have been duplicated and which do not stem from the site itself, were behind the failure of many previous conservation efforts, whereas the effectiveness of a specific type of imported expertise can be better obtained through interaction with the locally developed ones.

Tourism, one of the largest industries in the world has often been seen as the means to revitalize historic cities. However, when operating in a historic urban centre, tourism must be managed controlled, and guided by city administrators. Users of the cultural resources, visitors to historic cities and tourism enterprises should contribute to the preservation of a city's physical fabric and cultural traditions. A comprehensive, citywide planning is an essential tool to identify and realize the opportunities presented by tourism and to mitigate the problems it can create (Feilden, and Jokilehto, 1998).

Most world heritage sites are major attractions. And tourism is expanding rapidly world wide, even more so in the case of cultural tourism, which generates crowds that are sometimes disproportionate in these heritage environments that are often of limited sizes. Not only by the residents, but also impact the nature and the spirit of the place. This phenomenon has long been documented (Shackley, M.1998). In Petra, for example, and after its inscription in the world heritage list in 1985, the number of tourists increased noticeably. This rapid increase in visitors has resulted in correspondingly rapid and largely unplanned expansion of transportation infrastructure and accommodation facilities (Davis,2005).
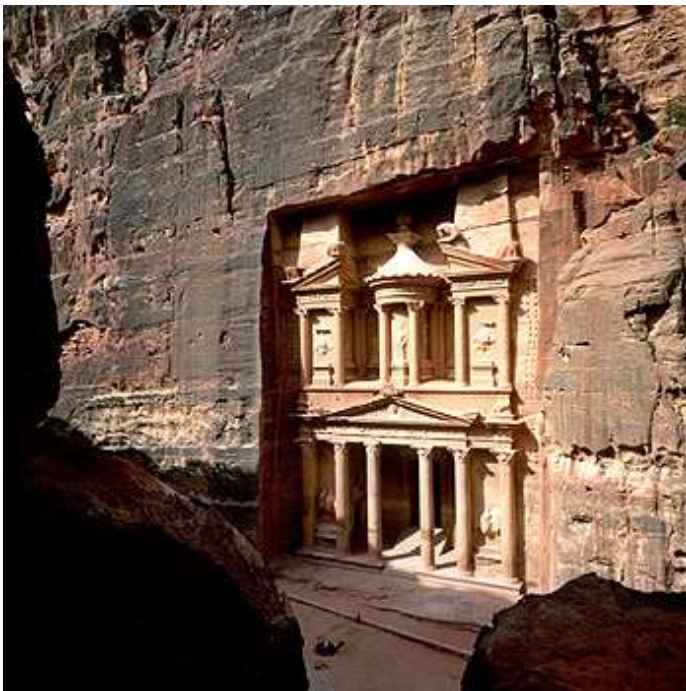
Image 2: archeological site, Petra, Jordan

The development of a dominant tourist sector sometimes ending as a mono industry might tend to weaken the city and/or the region' s traditional activities and their ability to generate diversified alternatives; Excessive and mismanaged tourist flows also generate cultural and social risks. The local community may be or feel expelled from its own physical and symbolic territory, to be replaced by wealthier newcomers and foreign permanent or visiting populations (Visu, 2005). The weakening of local traditions reduced to superficial folklore by their commercial "mise en scene"; also the shrinking of social and cultural initiatives to a mere artificial representation, only aimed at tourists' benefit rather than at the inner expression and deepening of local communities' social and cultural identity, vitality and their opening up to the world.

Another related case is at the world heritage site of Petra, Jordan. Upon inscription in the list in 1985, the Bedoul[2] residents who used to live in caves near the Petra old city centre were removed to Umm Sayhum, a settlement of good housing, a school and clinic. They were assured of continuing work within Petra as archeologists, laborers and traders. But many of these residents vacated the new village during the hot weather in favor of the countryside where they live in their old style. Those who remained usually camped out, some on the roofs of the very houses. Just like Victoria Falls, the spirit of life of Petra has been enormously exorcised, at the expense of both tourists and the residents.

4. Conclusion

There is no question that international debates have deepened and expanded the notions of heritage and conservation. This evolution has included the drawing up of charters and conventions, which in turn has given impetus to further developments. In the course of the last few years, there has been a considerable increase in such documents. Today, however, questions are being raised as to the reality of these contributions. There is growing unease over these conventions and charters the relevance and authority of which are sometimes contested[3] . With regard to practice, the norms expressed in charters and conventions have had a positive effect all over the world. Their general message has been acknowledged, and recommendations have been widely followed.

This is not applied fully in some part of the world, where World Heritage Sites (WHSs) has been always a burden on courtiers of low resources. They are, in theory, part of global heritage and are thus subject to the policies and laws of an international order. In reality, however, international legislation is notoriously difficult to implement without the support of the states concerned. This is what has been mentioned in article 4 of the convention .

Western derives charters, methods and conservation philosophy are not necessarily appropriate to non-western cultures or to the realities of developing economies. Aestheticism, historical continuity and materialistic wealth, for example, are predominantly European values. It is vital to understand people's values and standards,

---

[2] The Bedul are a small tribe of Bedouin who used to live in the caves in Petra. The Jordanian government built them a small village north of Petra proper with schools and modern utilities.

[3] An article written by Jean-Louis Luxen , in Getty newspaper NO. 19.2 . The title is 'Reflection on the use of heritage charters and convention'. Jean-Louis Luxen is the former secretary-general of ICOMOS. He is currently president of Culture, Heritage and Development International ASBL (CHEDI), which is based in Brussels.

which differ according to their cultural and economic background. It could be argued for example that conservation denies the Muslim philosophy that housing is but a temporary earthy shelter which is renewed in response to the changing size and needs of the extended family. Proposed conservation programs also have to recognize the realities of situation. Providing design guidelines publication to residents who are unable to read them or more significantly, unable to afford realizes repairs in accordance with them, is counterproductive. Situations have to be approached in response to local needs and in keeping with local culture.

References:

Al-Asad, M. and Serageldin, I., 1997, Conservation of Old Sana in I. Serageldin (ed.) The Architecture of Empowerment: People, Shelter and Livable Cities, London. Academy edition.

Aplin, G.,2002, Heritage Identification, Conservation and Management. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Beck, W., 2006, Narratives of World heritage in Travel Guidebooks in Travel Guidebooks, International Journal of Heritage Studies, 12, No. 6, 521-535.

Buckley, R., 2002, *World Heritage Icon Value: Contribution of World Heritage Branding to Nature Tourism.* Canberra: Australian Heritage Commission.

Buckley,R.,2004, 'The Effects of World Heritage Listing on Tourism to Australian National Parks'. *Journal of Sustainable Tourism* 12, no. 1 (2004): 70–84.

Dann, G.,1999 'Writing out the Tourist in Space and Time'. *Annals of Tourism Research* 26, no. 1 (1999):159–87.

Davis, P.,2005, Tourist and Locals: Getting on Together and Getting Re-elected, 8th OWHC World Symposium, Cusco, Peru.

Dower, M., 1974, Tourism and Conservation, Working Together, Architect' Journal 166, 941-63.

Erlet, C. , 1991, Sustainable Tourism in the Third World, Problems and Prospects, Discussion paper 3, Department of Geography, University of Reading.

Feilden, Sir B. and Jokilehto, J., 1998, Management Guidelines for the World Cultural Heritage Sites, Rome ICCROM.

Hall, C. M. and Piggin, R., 2001, Tourism and World Heritage in OECD Countries. *Tourism Recreation Research* **26**:1 , pp. 103-105.

Hewison, R. (Uzzell, D. ed.), 1989, Heritage: An Interpretation. *Heritage Interpretation. , The Natural and Built Environment* pp. 15-23. Belhaven , London . Hitchcock, M. (2004) Afterward. *Current Issues in Tourism* **7**:4 & 5, pp. 461-466.

Jokilehto ,J., 2006, World Heritage: Defining the outstanding universal value , city and time Journal,   volume 2, No.2.

Orbasly, A., 2000, Tourists in Historic Towns, Urban Conservation and Heritage management, Taylor & Francis, UK.Shackley, M. (Shackley, M. ed.), 1998, Introduction - World Cultural Heritage Sites. *Visitor Management: Case Studies from World Heritage Sites* Butterworth-Heinemann , Oxford .

Visu, S. 2005, the Difficult and Perpetual Conciliation Between the Residents, the Business and the Tourist: the Ease of City of Quebec, 8th OWHC World Symposium, Cusco, Peru.