Sessions 3A and 3A-a

Introducing Cultural Heritage into the Sustainable Development Agenda

The cultural heritage has been absent from the sustainable development debate despite its crucial importance to societies and the wide acknowledgment of its importance at national level. It has also been absent despite the wide ratification of the UNESCO Culture Conventions by the Organization's Member States.
Globalization, urbanization and climate change can threaten the cultural heritage and weaken cultural diversity.
What measures are needed to promote the safeguarding of the cultural heritage in the global development agenda?
What are the concrete actions that need to be taken in order to integrate cultural heritage conservation and promotion into the sustainable development debate?

Background Note[1]

Cultural Heritage and Sustainable Development: A Rationale for Engagement

Over recent years, and as a result of major phenomena such as climate change, globalization, the world financial crisis, growing inequalities and globally increasing urban populations, the linkages between cultural heritage and sustainable development have taken centre stage within the development sector and beyond.

While the unique role fulfilled by the cultural heritage in providing for people's spiritual needs and quality of life remains undisputed in the face of the above challenges, some are beginning to ask how the imperative of safeguarding the cultural heritage can be balanced with other equally legitimate – and often more pressing – needs, especially in developing regions. The question that is being posed is not so much how to ensure the sustainability of the cultural heritage, but rather how to justify its relevance to sustainable development in the larger sense and in a rapidly changing environment, or, in other words, how to justify its relevance to the protection of environmental resources and human wellbeing across all dimensions and from an inter-generational perspective.

An examination of the linkages between sustainable development and the cultural heritage should start by recognizing the important role that the latter plays in society.

Today, as in the past, the cultural heritage continues to perform its irreplaceable role as a vector of meaning and identity for communities and individuals. However, it is striking how far the very definition of what constitutes the cultural heritage, in both its tangible and intangible forms, has evolved within the scientific community over recent decades to include an increasingly large section of the environment and human forms of expression.

The tangible cultural heritage today is no longer limited to great monuments and iconic archaeological sites, but also encompasses a much larger array of culturally significant places, such as historic cities, living rural areas and seascapes,

_____

[1] Prepared by Giovanni Boccardi and Cécile Duvelle

gardens or sacred forests and mountains, industrial areas, and even sites associated with painful memories and war. Collections of movable items within sites, museums, cultural properties and archives have also increased significantly in scope, testifying not only to the lifestyles of kings and the achievements of great artists, but also to the everyday lives of peoples. Similarly, the intangible cultural heritage, which gained greater recognition and a more formal status following the adoption by UNESCO of a Convention for its safeguarding in 2003, includes oral traditions, the performing arts, social practices, rituals, festive events, and knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe or the knowledge and skills to produce traditional crafts.

Also connected to the social transformations that have taken place in recent years is the fact that the identification of the cultural heritage and decisions on how to use it are no longer considered as technical questions to be decided exclusively by a few 'experts' but instead have become an integral part of the public debate and subjects of concern for various groups of interests within the communities concerned. Hence, its role as an active agent of social transformation needs to be increasingly underscored.

At a more fundamental level, the cultural heritage is inherently relevant to the debate on sustainable development because it reflects and symbolizes the mutual adaptation over time between humans and their environments and how people relate to the earth and to the cosmos. It also reflects and symbolizes people's attitudes to and beliefs in other forms of life, their relationships to other human communities and within their own, and what they value in order to sustain and improve their quality of life. Seen from this angle, the cultural heritage demonstrates the inextricable link between cultural and biological diversity, which, rather than existing in separate and parallel realms, interacts with and affect each other in complex ways in a co-evolutionary process.

The cultural heritage is linked to the lives of communities and is fully integrated into social, economic and environmental processes, making it an integral part of people's daily experience. As a result, any effort aimed at protecting the environment and improving the social and economic wellbeing of communities needs to consider the cultural heritage and the opportunities it may offer when its potential is harnessed and the challenges associated with its inappropriate use. This fundamental principle was recognized in the outcome document of Rio + 20, 'The Future We Want',[2] in particular by stressing how 'many people, especially the poor, depend directly on ecosystems for their livelihoods, their economic, social and physical well-being, and their *cultural heritage*' (emphasis added), or by calling for the 'conservation as appropriate of the natural and cultural heritage of human settlements, the revitalization of historic districts, and the rehabilitation of city centres.'

The Contribution of Cultural Heritage to Sustainable Development

But how exactly can the cultural heritage contribute to sustainable development? How can the relationship between the cultural heritage and the various dimensions of sustainable development be articulated?

The safeguarding of cherished cultural heritage sites and of the ensemble of the intangible cultural expressions, knowledge and skills that collectively define a community can be considered in itself to be a contribution to human

---

[2] Accessible online at:
http://www.uncsd2012.org/content/documents/727The%20Future%20We%20Want%2019%20June%201230pm.pdf , paragraphs 30 and 134.

wellbeing. Without the cultural heritage – the familiar landmarks of our cities and landscapes, the traditions and particular ways of life inherited from our ancestors – our very existence as individuals would be hard to imagine.

This consideration, self-evident though it may be, has not, however, been enough to secure the cultural heritage, and culture in general, a place within the international framework of sustainable development and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). As a result, in addition to its intrinsic value for present and future generations, it is important to elaborate how the cultural heritage can make a critical and *instrumental* contribution to sustainable development in all its core dimensions, as defined, for example, in the United Nations report 'Realizing the Future We Want for All'[3] – in other words, to environmental sustainability, inclusive social and economic development, and peace and security.

Through the provision of a variety of associated goods and services, a well-protected historic environment (including cultural landscapes and protected areas that are rich in biodiversity) and the nurturing of the traditional knowledge and practices associated with its care may contribute directly to alleviating poverty and inequalities by providing security and promoting health, as well as by contributing to the provision of shelter, clean air, fresh water, land, food, and other key resources that provide the livelihood of communities. This is particularly true in developing regions, where the cultural heritage tends to be less 'monumental' and more connected to the living practices of communities.

Maintaining the cultural heritage is also important in addressing risks relating to natural and human-made disasters. Experience has shown that the degradation of natural resources, neglected rural areas, urban sprawl and poorly engineered new constructions increase the vulnerability of communities to the risk of disasters, especially in poorer countries. On the other hand, a well-conserved natural and historic environment based on traditional knowledge and skills and combined with a cohesive society rooted in strong cultural capital can considerably reduce underlying disaster-risk factors, strengthen the resilience of communities, and save lives. Entire indigenous communities in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands survived the Indian Ocean tsunami in 2005 that killed more than 200,000 people in the region, for example, as a result of the preservation of mangroves which provided an effective shield to soften the impact of the tsunami and the preservation of oral traditions relating to the experience of previous earthquakes. Stories of a 'huge shaking of the ground followed by a high wall of water' that had been transmitted across generations reflected the collective memory of the earthquakes and tsunamis of the past, causing these communities to move to higher ground and allowing them to escape before the tsunami struck.[4]

Activities associated with the stewardship of the cultural heritage are green 'by design' in that they embody an intrinsically more sustainable pattern of land use, consumption and production that has been developed over centuries if not millennia of constant adaptation between communities and their environments. For this reason, investment in the safeguarding of the cultural heritage has been recognized by major players such as the World Bank as a good way to mitigate CO_2 emissions and address climate change.

The cultural heritage is a powerful asset for inclusive economic development, since it attracts investment and ensures green, locally-based, stable and decent jobs relating to a wide range of sustainable activities in areas such as conservation, construction, food production, traditional healing and pharmacopoeia, crafts of all kinds and the arts in

---

[3] Accessible at:
http://www.undp.org/content/dam/undp/library/Poverty%20Reduction/Realizing%20the%20future%20we%20want.pdf
[4] http://academic.evergreen.edu/g/grossmaz/LEEPERFY/

general, not to mention tourism. These jobs rely on human and other resources that cannot be moved out of the communities concerned, and when compared with other sectors of activity they offer economic opportunities to all groups within society, including women and young people.

Most of all, however, the cultural heritage is closely connected to the fundamental components of inclusive social development. As a vehicle that expresses values and identity and organizes communities and their relationships through its powerful symbolic and aesthetic dimensions, the cultural heritage is essential to people's spiritual wellbeing in the most profound sense. The acknowledgment and conservation of the diversity of the cultural heritage, along with fair access to it and the equitable sharing of the benefits deriving from its use, enhance the feeling of place and belonging, and the respect for others and the sense of collective purpose and ability to maintain the common good, that contribute to the cohesion of communities while reducing inequalities.

Strengthening the traditional modes of transmission of knowledge and integrating the cultural heritage into formal and non-formal education allows people to take full advantage of the educational potential of the intangible cultural heritage. Families, clans, tribes, elders, peer groups and traditional structures all play major roles in this collective effort. The transmission and practice of the intangible cultural heritage among these communities brings a wealth of knowledge and skills to the younger generations, including key concepts of science and technology, forms of participatory governance and socio-economic activities. It is for this reason that the ability to access, enjoy and care for heritage is an essential cultural right and a fundamental component of what the economist Amartya Sen has called the 'capability of individuals to live and to be what they choose,' which is an essential part of the very definition of human development.

The fundamental roles played by the cultural heritage are threatened today by a number of factors, including the massive urbanization that is now underway in many parts of the world, leading to the destruction of the built cultural heritage and to new challenges for the intangible cultural heritage. These newly expanding cities host increasing numbers of migrants and heterogeneous communities, and they are marked by a growing number of conflicts and political tensions.

At such times of crisis, access to and care for the cultural heritage may help vulnerable people recover a sense of continuity, dignity and empowerment. In post-conflict situations in particular, the acknowledgment and safeguarding of the cultural heritage, when based on shared values and interests, may help foster mutual recognition and understanding and tolerance and respect among different communities, which are preconditions for a society's peaceful development.

Sometimes, and possibly for these very reasons, the cultural heritage has been the target of deliberate destruction, with the intention of obliterating the very identity of individuals and groups, severing their links to the land and breaking the bonds that keep them together as a community. This happened in 2001 in Afghanistan when the giant statues of the Buddha at Bamiyan were destroyed, and similar destruction is being witnessed today in northern Mali.

In addition to causing the loss of the benefits associated with the enjoyment and stewardship of the cultural heritage, such acts of willful destruction or persecution make reconciliation between the conflicting parties much more difficult in the future, and they hold societies back from turning the page towards peace. Protecting the cultural heritage from the risks associated with conflict situations, including when lives are at risk and humanitarian concerns are a priority, is therefore not a luxury, but a fundamental security issue. Conversely, in the post-conflict phase the rehabilitation of the cultural heritage may help to contribute to healing the scars of war.

Implications for the Post-2015 Development Agenda

What, then, are the implications for the post-2015 development agenda? Where and how should the cultural heritage feature within future sustainable development goals?

The opportunities are numerous across a broad spectrum of sustainable development concerns, from stable employment to human rights, and from resilient cities to environmental protection.

The time is ripe for deepening the understanding of such relationships and identifying and promoting evidence-based arguments to make the case for positioning the cultural heritage as a crucial contributor to sustainable development. This will mean identifying, as far as this is possible, quantitative and qualitative targets and indicators that express the contribution of the cultural heritage to sustainable development. Such targets and indicators could draw from the successful programmes being implemented by UNESCO[5] and FAO[6], as well as from the COMPACT Programme[7], the Satoyama Initiative,[8] the conservation-related programmes of the World Bank[9] and regional development banks, the Convention on Biological Diversity,[10] the European Landscape Convention,[11] the Council of Europe Framework Convention on the Value of Cultural Heritage for Society (Faro Convention),[12] and other relevant examples.

Any agenda for the integration of the cultural heritage into the post-2015 sustainable development paradigm will need to consider how this will relate to the overarching principles identified as priorities by the international community, among them promoting sustainability and reducing inequalities while addressing human security and human rights.

Finally, it will be important to place the emphasis on the potential offered by the cultural heritage as a way of reinforcing international commitments to cooperation and on the major role played in this regard by the relevant UNESCO Culture Conventions.[13]

---

[5] The UNESCO *Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage* (1972) with its 190 State Parties (as at September 2012).

[6] Globally Important Agricultural Heritage System (GIAHS) http://www.giahs.org/giahs/en/

[7] http://sgp.undp.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=103&Itemid=165#.UXWUN8r7DMo

[8] A joint initiative by the Ministry of the Environment of Japan and the United Nations University Institute of Advanced Studies (UNU-IAS), the Satoyama Initiative aims to conserve sustainable human-influenced natural environments (Socio-Ecological Production Landscapes and Seascapes, or SEPLS) through broader global recognition of their value. See: http://satoyama-initiative.org/en/

[9] For instance, on cultural heritage and sustainable tourism: http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/TOPICS/EXTURBANDEVELOPMENT/EXTCHD/0,,menuPK:430436~pagePK:149018~piPK:149093~theSitePK:430430,00.html

[10] http://www.cbd.int/convention/text/

[11] http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/cultureheritage/heritage/Landscape/default_en.asp

[12] http://conventions.coe.int/Treaty/Commun/QueVoulezVous.asp?NT=199&CM=8&CL=ENG

[13] See http://www.unesco.org/new/en/culture/ for the texts of the UNESCO Conventions.