



United Nations
Educational, Scientific and
Cultural Organization



World
Heritage
Centre



WORLD HERITAGE CITY DIALOGUES

Summary Outcomes
2020

World Heritage Cities Programme

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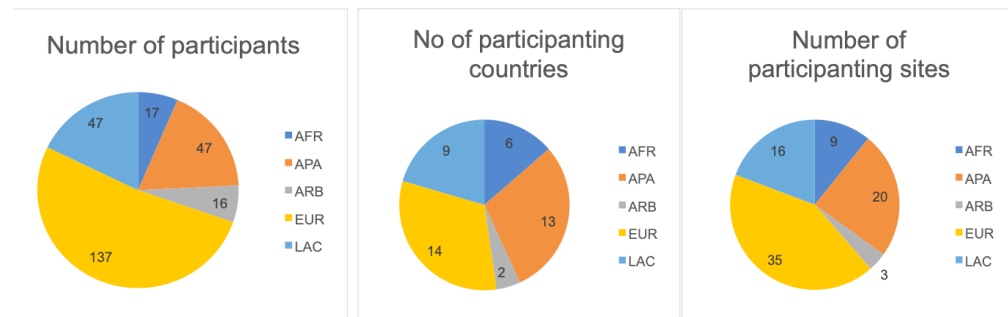
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People's Republic of China.

World Heritage City Dialogues

2020 summary outcomes

The World Heritage Centre developed the World Heritage City Dialogues (Dialogues) in 2019 within the context of the World Heritage Cities Programme, one of the six thematic programmes approved and monitored by the World Heritage Committee.

In 2020, nine regional sessions of the World Heritage Dialogues gathered more than 250 participants across the five global regions. During these exchanges, site managers, national Focal Points for World Heritage and heritage professionals representing World Heritage properties from 83 properties in 44 countries shared their experiences and challenges, especially in the context of the ongoing crises of the pandemic. Many thanks are due to the Regional Units of the World Heritage Centre and colleagues from the UNESCO Field Offices who helped gather the site managers and Focal Points – and sometimes supported with informal interpretation.



The Dialogues have strengthened bonds and stimulated informal exchanges between the World Heritage Centre and the site managers and the National Focal points working at the local and national levels. At each of the Dialogue sessions, the site managers and national Focal Points have emphasised the importance of a network for sharing and learning from each other and appreciated the organisation of the Dialogues for providing such a platform. The

Dialogues serve as a forum for each to share experiences, knowledge, challenges, and initiatives of their urban World Heritage sites and create a sense of community and peer-to-peer support. At the same time, they are a way to reinforce messages and provide technical assistance regarding policies and processes of the 1972 UNESCO [Convention concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage](#) (World Heritage Convention); to encourage the implementation of the approach of the 2011 UNESCO [Recommendation on the Historic Urban Landscape](#) (HUL Recommendation), share strategies for implementing the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development Goals, and to share and develop solutions in a collective and collaborative way with respect to the ongoing pandemic and its impact on the World Heritage properties.

Added to general management challenges for World Heritage cities, one of the main focuses of the year has been the COVID-19 crisis and the challenges that it has brought to our cities. During the Dialogues, site managers identified some key challenges, shared some strategies and solutions, and identified a need for further discussion and advanced training in some areas.

Key challenges identified

Impacts related to the COVID-19 pandemic:

- Conservation works were stopped during lockdown periods in some places but resumed soon after;
- In some places, landscaping and other works have continued as scheduled;
- Surge in unauthorised construction works during the lockdown as residents carried out unauthorised additions and demolitions in internal spaces;
- Inability of staff to monitor ongoing conservation works;
- Worsening state of conservation during lockdown period as vegetation grew wildly in archaeological sites;

- Drop in commercial activity as souks, squares, and commercial streets have become deserted;
- Vandalism in shops as concerned authorities were unable to keep the same degree of control during this period;
- Celebrations linked to religious festivals and cultural activities such as those related to Ramadan did not occur;
- Tourism at a standstill; hotel accommodations minimal;
- The lack of tourists and people provided a valuable opportunity for completing documentation and inventorying;
- Economic impacts of the loss of tourism seem to have affected small towns, dependent on tourism, more than big cities with a diversity of economic activities;
- Staff shortages due to sickness;
- Budget cuts resulting in a reduction in staff and activities.

Other key issues and challenges:

- Building back better in the context of the pandemic;
- Necessity to develop strategies to enhance sustainable development approaches as well as a need for examples of good practices;
- Need for robust governance mechanisms, better laws and regulations and better enforcement;
- Ensuring efficient management frameworks;
- HUL Recommendation Approach:
 - Importance of natural setting and environment for the World Heritage city;
 - Need to address management of heritage city at territorial scale;
 - Many heritage structures are privately owned and require a clear strategy;

- Need to prepare management plans in alignment with the HUL Recommendation approach ;
- Need for systematic Heritage Impact Assessments for new projects;
- Conservation budgets are not adequate, so there is a need to bring together the private sector;
- Necessity of digitalisation and improved online tools;
- Urban Expansion:
 - The population expansion within historic cities and need to accommodate territorial expansion create considerable development pressures;
 - Need to address satellite towns and urban expansion;
 - Need to minimise urban fragmentation;
- Traditional building materials and techniques:
 - Need to rethink the approach to update traditional building materials and techniques to adapt to contemporary needs and safety standards;
 - Difficulty of employing traditional building materials as traditional materials, such as timber, for instance, are no longer available;
 - Need for better performance of earthen architecture to ensure technical solutions to support residents to continue using traditional architecture but make the necessary changes to adapt to contemporary use;
 - Foreign investors bring inappropriate materials and techniques;
 - Fire safety and timber resistance;
- Infrastructure:
 - Challenge to integrate new infrastructure in and around historic built fabric and while protecting Outstanding Universal Value (OUV);

- Need for updated and better infrastructure development including transportation;
- Local communities
 - Addressing socio-economic development needs of local communities especially concerning infrastructure;
 - Urgent need to address poverty in several of the cities where poverty is linked with social exclusion, racism, and political instability;
 - Community participation – managing stakeholders;
- Need to establish sustainable tourism practices;
- Gentrification and overemphasis on tourism and heritage scenography;
- Climate Change, sea-level rise, and need for adaptation measures.

Strategies and solutions

Participants shared strategies and solutions, including:

- Sanitary regulations:
 - Sites opened with new sanitary regulations including masks and restrictions in numbers;
 - Robust protocols and travel bans;
 - Islands restricted (for example);
 - Testing and temperature checks;
 - Sanitation and cleaning programmes
- Responding to the economic impacts and related consequences of the pandemic and the role of heritage in the recovery;
 - Focus on the well-being of the residents:
 - Enhancing green spaces;

- Enhancing the role of archaeological sites and historic structures to enhance the emotional well-being of local communities;
 - Reclaiming heritage sites, public spaces, and streets by local residents and families (rather than tourists) enhancing a sense of communities;
 - New public uses for heritage sites as local communities used them for exercise and reconnecting during lockdown;
 - Enhancing the quality of life of residents;
- Community response and support:
 - Communities and neighbourhoods have been activated to support those in need;
 - Support for neighbourhood businesses has been mobilised;
 - Promote the use of the site by local communities;
 - Education on heritage for children in schools;
 - Empower bottom-up approaches and initiatives;
 - Decisive collective action by communities;
 - Food and medicine delivered to residents at their homes;
 - Youth programmes;
 - Networks of site managers within a country have been developed;
- Local economic development alternatives to tourism:
 - Investment on the rehabilitation of historic city and monuments as a way to promote job creation for the local population;
 - Incentives provided to local businesses;
 - Loans and subsidies to those impacted economically
 - Encourage local crafts and artists;
 - Supporting local farmers markets;
 - Supporting and encouraging local farmers and food production;

- Some small towns have relied on artists for economic rehabilitation;
 - Focus on agricultural and manufacturing activities;
 - Digital Documentation and Communication:
 - Use the opportunity of the pandemic to complete inventories and documentation of heritage properties;
 - Develop digital communication material on heritage properties to enhance outreach, communication, and education;
 - Establish digital marketing strategies for local crafts and products;
 - Development of mobile applications;
 - Religious activities broadcast online;
 - Sustainable tourism:
 - Focusing on domestic tourists;
 - Focus on high quality and fewer visitors;
 - Creating digital tourism material;
- Governance mechanisms and management systems:
 - Need to identify more robust governance mechanisms and management systems;
 - Challenge of conflicting or fragmented authorities between local, regional, and national agencies;
 - Integration of local communities in planning processes;
 - Enhancing connections between urban planning and urban development processes and site management/heritage conservation activities;
 - Harmonising different decision-making bodies to ensure coherence;
 - Lack of coordination and consensus at different levels;

- Management Plans:
 - Essential to develop and update in line with the HUL Recommendation;
 - The management plan must be integrated with the city master plan in order to give it legal recognition;
 - Need to control new developments, uses, and protect OUV;
 - Integrate traditional building techniques and construction systems including through building regulations and codes that accommodate them;
- Transportation
 - New bicycle and pedestrian ways;
 - Routing of delivery trucks and commercial vehicles;
 - Mixed-use with commercial and residential difficult with heavy commercial operations;
 - Opportunities for carbon reduction;
 - Need strategic approaches to transportation;
- Urban planning and land-use:
 - Bringing back families to the city centre;
 - Reintroduce mixed-use in city centres;
 - Implementation of the HUL Recommendation, especially considering integrating urban planning, conservation projects and heritage management plans;
 - Management of rapid urbanisation and informal settlements.

Future Dialogues or City Labs may be organised on some of the topics of concern.