

2018 High-Level Political Forum

Contribution by the UNESCO World Heritage Committee

(a) an assessment of the situation regarding the principle of “ensuring that no one is left behind” at the global level

Through a variety of goods and services and as a storehouse of knowledge, a well-protected World Heritage property may contribute directly to alleviating poverty and inequalities by providing basic goods and services, such as security and health, through shelter, access to clean air, water, food and other key resources. Very often, World Heritage is also an important asset for economic development, by attracting investments and ensuring green, locally-based, stable and decent jobs, only some of which may be related to tourism. The harnessing of this potential, however, requires the implementation of appropriate policies, at national and local levels, that would integrate a sustainable perspective and go beyond conservation per se.

(b) the identification of gaps, areas requiring urgent attention, risks and challenges

The Secretariat of the Convention endeavours to mainstream sustainable development in all its activities and processes as appropriate and to provide support to the countries, especially the most vulnerable ones, in developing relevant policies and programmes, to facilitate the integration of the sustainable development perspective in the broader framework of heritage management, with a particular focus on the implication of communities in the life and management of World Heritage sites and their long-term aspirations for sustainable development. An important challenge remains the finding the right balance between the protection of heritage and the sometimes insensitive development projects which are wrongly understood as contributing to the well-being of the communities, thus compromising the potential for contributing to SD.

(c) valuable lessons learned on transformation towards sustainable and resilient societies

Key lessons learnt include the inherent ability of heritage to ensure ownership and participation in development processes, as well as to facilitate dialogue and mutual understanding among diverse groups within society. In this regard, several programmes and community-based heritage conservation projects have been defined and developed in the Africa region notably further to the International Conference “Safeguarding African World Heritage as a Driver for Sustainable Development” held in Arusha in 2016. Others capacity-building activities and operational projects have been also developed and launched in Asia-Pacific, Latin-America and the Caribbean, Europe and North-America and Arab States region. These activities have successfully contributed to the involvement of local communities in the properties’ management and their long-term aspirations for sustainable development. They further demonstrated the essential link between communities and their heritage, and showcased how the involvement of local communities in the upkeep and restoration of sites can bring about not only significant material benefits, but also a sense of purpose and ownership, reinforcing or recreating the bond between people and the World Heritage property.

Also, integrated approaches that are people-centred, concerning site management, planning, job creation are essential for heritage to fully harness its potential to contribute towards resilient and sustainable societies.

(d) emerging issues likely to affect building sustainable and resilient societies

Conflicts and natural disasters, along with globalization and Development pressure represent the main threats to the cultural and natural heritage which affect its ability to contribute to sustainable and resilient societies. At times of crisis, however, access to and care for the heritage may help vulnerable people recover a sense of continuity, dignity and empowerment. In conflict and post-conflict situations, in particular, the acknowledgment and conservation of heritage, based on shared values and interests, may foster mutual recognition, tolerance and respect among different communities, which is a precondition for a society's peaceful development. However, despite the recognition of culture within the 2030 Agenda for sustainable development, awareness of the importance of heritage for sustainable development, including at the level of policy and decision-makers, is still relatively low.

(e) areas where political guidance by the high-level political forum is required

The key area where political guidance by the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development is required is the integration of a concern for heritage within sustainable development policies and plans at national and local levels taking into account the explicit reference in Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development to the need to enhance the safeguarding of cultural and natural heritage.

(f) policy recommendations on ways to accelerate progress in establishing sustainable and resilient societies.

To accelerate progress a comprehensive set of policy recommendations has been formulated in the framework of the World Heritage Convention, the most important international standard setting instrument in this field. A Policy for the integration of a sustainable development perspective into the processes of the Convention was indeed adopted by the General Assembly of the States Parties to the World Heritage Convention at its 20th Session in November 2015. This new policy revolves around the three dimensions of sustainable development, namely environmental sustainability, inclusive social development and inclusive economic development, complemented by the fostering of peace and security. It provides clear recommendations for the integration in heritage conservation and management of fundamental considerations such as the respect of human rights, gender equality, poverty alleviation, resilience, the rights of indigenous peoples and the reduction of the environmental footprint, among others. The policy is accessible at <http://whc.unesco.org/en/news/1387>.

