Forum: Special Conference

Issue: Preserving of the Cultural Heritage of Rapidly Developing Nations

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Introduction

Increasing populations and rapid development in countries is resulting in the destruction of many archaeological sites, artifacts as well as the loss of intangible cultural heritage, which includes oral tradition, performing arts and rituals. There have been movements made towards preserving cultural heritage globally. However, further measures need to be taken in order to properly preserve both tangible and intangible cultural heritage. New dangers and threats are constantly arising with the expansion and development of countries, making it harder for governments to produce sufficient funds, scientific and technological resources that are required to appropriately preserve cultural heritage. Heritage sites are of both scientific and sentimental value; these sites validate theories of human history.

Definition of Key Terms

Sites

Sites are works of man, nature and man and archaeological areas that are deemed to be of outstanding universal value.

Intangible Cultural Heritage

Oral traditions, performing arts, rituals etc.

Tangible Cultural Heritage

A monument, archaeological sites, works of art etc.

Background

The world cultural and natural heritage convention was adopted by the general conference of UNESCO in 1972. As of 2011 there have been 936 world heritage sites in 153 different countries.

United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and World Heritage Committee

UNESCO was formed in 1942, during World War II, in Europe. The World Heritage Committee was formed at the request of the members of UNESCO. Essentially the job of the World Heritage Committee is to determine which sites are to be listed as UNESCO World Heritage Sites. It is also responsible for upholding the World Heritage Convention and awarding funding to assist sites. One of the events that pushed for the creation of the Convention was the building of the Aswan High Dam in Egypt, which would have flooded the valley where the Abu Simbel temples were located, an ancient site that was part of the ancient Egyptian civilization. Both the Sudanese and Egyptian government appeals in 1959, which led to UNESCO launching an international safeguarding campaign. The temples were dismantled and moved. Several other similar events followed in Italy, Pakistan and Indonesia, which in turn led to UNESCO's preparation of a draft convention.

War and the Destruction of Cultural Heritage Sites

During times of war these cultural heritage sites are most vulnerable. Most recently during the war in Iraq, the United States ignored warning of organization on the protection of Iraq's heritage sites. The US military even set up one of heir military bases at the site of ancient Babylon. Coalition forces destroyed and damage many historic buildings, and destroyed unprotected archeological sites.

Recently ISIL has been heavily involved in the destruction of several cultural heritage sites in Iraq mainly Shiite mosques and shrines, implanting explosives or bulldozing them. ISIL also destroyed shrines near Tripoli, Libya in March 2015. Similarly in Syria several mosques were destroyed as well as the destruction of significant monuments such as the ancient Assyrian gateway lion sculpture from the 8th century BC.

In retaliation UNESO launched the Unite4Heritage campaign in an attempt to protect heritage sites that are under threat from religious extremists like ISIL. It is a campaign that is run through social media to counter the propaganda that support cultural cleansing and the destruction of cultural heritage sites.

Development and Cultural Heritage Sites

With rapidly developing nations and globalization the dangers that these natural and cultural heritage sites face is only growing. Transport systems have developed and tourism makes up a large part of countries economies. Venice has an estimated 20,000 visitors each day at certain times during the year, it has been said that this number of tourists can greatly impact the cultural sites.

Development in cities has also taken its toll on cultural heritage sites. Construction and abandoned projects has left sites open to the elements or altered it's surrounding, leaving them more vulnerable. Not having these sites

properly preserved and enclosed results in wind erosion, which will eventually lead to the destruction of that cultural heritage site.

Major Parties Involved

UNESCO

UNESCO currently has five major themes to its programs: Education, Natural Science, Social and Human Sciences, Culture and Communication and Information. UNESCO headquarters are based in Paris and it has several field offices around the world.

World Heritage Committee

The World Heritage Committee was formerly founded by UNESCO, and has been assigned the task of establishing sites that should be listed as UNESCO World Heritage Sites. 21 member nations constitute the World Heritage Committee, elected by the General Assembly of State Parties and each holding a four-year term. The World Heritage Committee meets once a year to discuss the management of existing World Heritage Sites. The most recent session was held in Bonn, Germany and the upcoming 2016 session is to be held in Istanbul, Turkey.

IUCN (World Conservation Union)

The World Conservation Union, previously known as the International Union for the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources, is one of the most important conservation networks worldwide. It is composed of both member nations and non-governmental organizations (NGO's). Its headquarters are in Gland, Switzerland and it works in close collaboration with the World Heritage Committee, mainly as an advisory body.

ICOMOS (International council on Monuments and Sites)

ICOMOS is one of the only global NGO's working to conserve and protect cultural heritages sites. It works closely with UNESCO and the UN, however is independent. It advises the World Heritage Committee on cultural sites. It also attempts to promote the appreciation and understanding of our cultural heritage sites.

Previous Attempts to Resolve the Issue

World Heritage Convention

The implementation of the World Heritage Convention in 1972, which lead to the world heritage sites being created, was the first attempt to resolve the issue. On signing the Convention, each country pledge to conserve the cultural and natural sites within its borders that are recognized by the convention as UNESCO world heritage sites. The Convention set out the duties of member nations in both identifying potential UNESCO heritage sites and preserving these sites. The Convention explains how the World Heritage Fund is to be used and under

what circumstances and condition it is given to that member nation. Modification and amendments have been made to this resolution over the years, however it is still globally recognized and held in high regard.

A Brighter Outlook for World Heritage and Agenda for Nature

A Brighter Outlook for World Heritage was a project supported by the MAVA foundation. It is about improving management of UNESCO heritage sites. It was implemented by the IUCN in support of its World Heritage Program and builds on the 2010-2014 Agenda for Nature. The Agenda for Nature aims included: effective management of sites, better monitoring, credible site selection, climate change response strategies and sustainable financing. The Brighter Outlook Project aims to produce increase the amount of knowledge on these sites, building relations to support decision making by the World Heritage Committee, support site-level action and when successful in the conservation of a site, display the results to encourage further conservation action.

Possible Solutions

- Effective Management, increasing the use of mechanisms of the Convention on World Heritage, and encourage countries that have not yet ratified to the Convention on World Heritage to do so.
- Improve monitoring systems for existing UNESCO world heritage sites, making them comprehensive and fit for the site.
- Ensure that all sites selected to be on the World Heritage List are suitable.
- Educated and train national governments and authorities on how to manage and properly preserve these sites. Provide these governments with not only training on how to properly manage these sites, but the sufficient funding to be able to secure these sites.
- Allow these sites to communicate and publicize the danger of climate change. Let them serve as a reminder to the public of the consequences of climate change and the damage is can incur. In turn hopefully encouraging them to exercise their best practice in terms of the conservation of energy.
- Promote cultural studies in schools, as a form of preserving intangible cultural heritage, placing emphasis within the curriculum on oral traditions, performing rituals etc. and their importance
- Promote governments and NGO's such as the Getty Conservation Institute to conduct research into new scientific technologies that will aid us in preserving artifacts and sites. So that simple things such as lighting used to display artifacts in museums do not damage or cause the degradation of an artifact.
- Have governments put in place procedures and precautions that need to be taken in the event of a natural of human induced disaster, to protect cultural property in museums etc.
- Assist governments with the formation of their own set of guidelines on how to properly preserve their cultural heritage sites based on the surrounding environment e.g. temperature, humidity etc.
- Work to prevent the discrimination of ethnic minorities and instead promote the integration of these ethnic minorities and the sharing of their cultural heritage and traditions.

- Ensure that the issue of protecting underwater cultural heritage is also addressed, with guidelines stipulating what needs to be done to adequately preserve these sites.
- Ensure that all areas have equal representation on the World Heritage List. Africa is underrepresented on the list, accounting for only 7% of properties, and faces constraints with funding the preservation of these sites.

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Appendix or Appendices

"The World Heritage Convention." *UNESCO*. Web. 11 Jan. 2016. **<http://whc.unesco.org/en/convention/>.**

This can give you a good understanding of the attempts that have been made to resolve the issue of preserving cultural heritage and the roles of the World Heritage Committee and UNESCO in resolving this issue.

"The Getty Conservation Institute." *Getty*. Web. 11 Jan. 2016. **<http://www.getty.edu/conservation/our_projects/past.html>.**

This is quite an interesting organization as they have made several advances in science and technology to help with the preservation of various artifacts and sites.