

2 Context: managing cultural heritage

Information from the field shows that, in practice, heritage management systems are often failing to involve local counterparts. Even when community involvement does take place, the level of participation in decision-making and the capacity of local stakeholders actually to engage and make contributions are often limited.

However, there are many factors that can hinder a participatory approach and render ineffective attempts at local community involvement at heritage properties: the management system itself, a power imbalance between stakeholders or political and socio-economic factors in the wider environment (poverty and civil unrest, or even deep-seated cultural values), are some examples.

Furthermore, a participatory approach that fails to engage all interest groups, particularly those who are often marginalized – women, youth and indigenous peoples are common examples – can actually do more damage than good. It can lead to flawed projects because heritage specialists may have failed to be properly informed about important aspects, or because of misunderstandings that then delay or block projects. The World Heritage Manual dedicated to Managing Tourism¹³ has a useful chapter on 'Involving stakeholders: the benefits and challenges of public participation'.

An effective participatory approach that delivers reciprocal benefits to the cultural property and to society depends on understanding:

- Who participates in decision-making, assessment, planning, implementation and evaluation processes, and how,
- Who contributes with experience, knowledge and skills, and how,
- Who benefits economically, socio-culturally and psychologically, and how.

In complex cases, this may call for in-depth studies of the political, socio-economic, legal and institutional context. Indeed, each interest group may need to be broken down into its component parts (or socio-cultural groups) because these include factors (gender, ages, class, language, origin, schooling, religion, etc.) which determine the nature of their contributions, and can thereby facilitate engagement in cultural heritage issues.

Similarly, it is important to understand who already has access to decision-making, information, education, etc. and who has not. If it is not clear what barriers are hindering access, an evaluation process should lead to corrective measures. This evaluation should be undertaken within the excluded interest group as much as within the heritage sector. Thus different social components will become visible so activities can be targeted in such a way that the contribution, ownership and participation of as many stakeholders as possible can be guaranteed. If it emerges that women, for example, are being excluded, it may be necessary to integrate gender equality as a formal consideration in all planning, implementation and monitoring processes in order to make this particular group visible and to harness their potential contributions, skills and needs while overcoming their difficulties.

Participatory processes often demand a readiness to accept difficult compromises and negotiate trade-offs. The neutrality and leverage of wider collaborations and cooperation in support of the cultural heritage property can facilitate this often difficult process.

Initiatives aimed at creating new forms of participation in heritage or reinforcing existing ones by working with stakeholders and wider interest groups are often known as a 'participatory approach'. These issues are explored further in Part 4 and Appendix A.

13. Pedersen, A. 2002. *Managing Tourism at World Heritage Sites: a Practical Manual for World Heritage Site Managers*. Paris, UNESCO World Heritage Centre. (World Heritage Manual 1.) <http://whc.unesco.org/en/series/1/> (English web page).