

The potential of heritage to contribute to environmental protection, social capital and economic growth is being increasingly recognized. The artificial isolation of heritage concerns from other sectors would be simply unfeasible, since external factors would 'continue to penalize heritage practice just as isolated heritage management decision-making would penalize the relationship of heritage to its context'.²¹

This is evident in the factors that have affected the state of conservation of World Heritage properties over the past few years (see Part 3.7). The statistics indicate that, in the great majority of cases, the problems responsible for the deterioration of these properties came from 'beyond the confines of the site, and the manager in place, however good, (had) limited capacity for change'.²² Contributing to sustainable development, within this perspective, would be not only an ethical obligation for the heritage sector, but in the long term a matter of survival, especially in the present financial crisis, where public expenditure for conservation is increasingly difficult to justify.

Emphasis on the first argument (cultural heritage as a legitimate end in itself), when not corroborated by evidence of the contribution of heritage to the other basic constituents of human well-being such as employment creation or other material benefits, has often placed heritage conservation in a sort of 'special reserve' of under-funded good intentions. The assumption that heritage places, including of course the 'sustainable land-use' mentioned in the *Operational Guidelines* for cultural landscapes, represent models of development that are inherently sustainable remains to be demonstrated, particularly when priority is given to 'protection' and acceptable limits for change are not determined. This has led to a concern that, unless its contributions to the other three pillars are clearly articulated and recognized, heritage risks remaining a marginal field in the wider framework of sustainable development.

Some have suggested, on the other hand, that too much attention is already being paid to socio-economic 'development', and that it is crucial to save as much as possible of the heritage that has survived until now, irrespective of the immediate benefits that it may yield to local communities, since this is a fundamental asset of the capital that will guarantee the development of future generations. They advocate a strong stance in favour of conservation as a legitimate goal in itself, particularly for some outstanding places such as those included in the World Heritage List. Socio-economic benefits deriving from heritage properties, in this perspective, would be of course desirable, but not strictly necessary to justify their conservation. The implications of taking the second approach (i.e. heritage to contribute to the three pillars of sustainable development) are significant for the sector, involving a shift in many parts of the world in the very philosophical and ethical standpoint of conservation.

There would be also important consequences for the theory and practice of the discipline. Heritage practitioners must understand the multiple linkages between heritage and the wider economic, social and environmental dimensions that clarify the processes of their mutual interaction and act accordingly. They have to engage with a wide range of people with different backgrounds and expertise, and a broader group of stakeholders must be considered. Decisions about heritage conservation would no longer be left in the hands of heritage experts, but discussed among many counterparts, based on solid arguments and shared goals, to reach compromises.

What is probably required is a combination of the two approaches, which are not mutually exclusive; on one hand, reaffirming the cultural value of heritage by rendering more explicit

21. Boccardi, G. 2012. *Introduction to Heritage and Sustainable Development*. Paper presented at Special Module on Sustainable Development during the ICCROM's course on Conservation Built Heritage.

22. Ibid.