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**The role of local communities in the management of World Heritage properties.
Some cases in Latin America.**

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Summary

In 2007 the World Heritage Committee added a fifth strategic objective for the implementation of the World Heritage Convention: communities. This implied the recognition of local communities, which can include indigenous people or traditional inhabitants, as a fundamental stakeholder in the processes of protection and conservation of World Heritage properties. In some cases, local communities have traditionally played a fundamental role in the preservation of the tangible and intangible attributes that convey heritage values; in other cases, conversely, they have had weak participation in those processes. The purpose of this paper is presenting some specific examples of World Heritage properties in Latin America which illustrate on the role of local communities in the management systems and on the impact of tourism on traditional ways of life: the cities of Colonia (Uruguay), Cartagena (Colombia) and the territory of Quebrada de Humahuaca (Argentina).

1. World Heritage values and the role of communities

The World Heritage Convention adopted by the General Conference of UNESCO in 1972 is addressed to cultural and natural properties and, in the case of cultural heritage, to immovable tangible properties, which includes a wide variety of scales and categories that encompass from individual monuments to territories. From the time of the adoption of the Convention onwards, the very concept of cultural heritage has changed, and includes today some categories not taken into account at that time, such as cultural landscapes, cultural routes or intangible heritage. The current conception of heritage implies a complex system of tangible and intangible components which are closely and indivisibly related.

When dealing with tangible heritage, we deal with objects to which we give values related to history, art, technique, social practices, traditions, etc. This means that heritage is composed by tangible attributes (materials, shape, design) which convey the values given to heritage. The idea of heritage as social construction developed especially from the 1990s onwards stresses the idea that heritage does not exist by itself but is created by people by attributing historical, artistic, technical or social values to a limited number of physical objects. The question could be who defines and establishes those values. Responses stemming from the realm of social sciences, especially anthropology, stress the role of political power and some individuals (scholars or experts) in the selection of those objects and in the determination of values. Those

values are conveyed to communities, which legitimate decisions taken by a small group of people. Once selected and defined, the objects that make up the cultural heritage are consecrated and protected by special norms and are the object of special plans and projects aiming to their proper conservation and management, processes led especially by experts and professionals.

This is a possible scheme, where communities play a rather passive role in the identification and conservation of heritage. The extension of the concept of heritage together with new visions related to protection, conservation and management processes give to communities a more active role, understanding that often local communities are the primary body where values and conservation principles and techniques have been harboured for centuries.

Just to give an example; the national park of Uluru, in Australia, was inscribed on the World Heritage List in 1987 as natural heritage, recognising the outstanding universal value of this spectacular geological formations that dominate the vast red sandy plain of central Australia. An extension was proposed by the State Party and adopted by the World Heritage Committee in 1994; this time the cultural values of the property were recognised as a cultural landscape representing the combined work of nature and of man, manifesting the interaction between humankind and its natural environment, and as an associative landscape having powerful religious, artistic, and cultural associations of the natural element. The views of local communities, in this case aboriginal people, had not been taken into account in the first nomination. What is important to stress is how different stakeholders had different views and feelings regarding a same object and how, with a wider and more comprehensive vision, different systems of values and relationships between the landscape and traditions were recognized and consecrated by the inscription on the World Heritage List.

2. Some examples in Latin America

I will present some Latin American examples, all of them inscribed on the World Heritage List and impacted by tourism, to illustrate different views on values and the role of local communities in the processes of managing heritage and transmitting those values to future generations.

a) Colonia del Sacramento, Uruguay

The historic quarter of Colonia del Sacramento was inscribed on the World Heritage List in 1995. The origin of the town was a village settled by Portuguese in 1680 on a peninsula by the east embankment of the Plata River, in front of the then Spanish town of Buenos Aires; at the end of the 18th century, it came definitively to Spanish rule. Colonia is an interesting example of merging of different urban and architectural features; although there are not impressive architectural monuments, the historic centre retains much of the typical atmosphere of a colonial town, enhanced by its setting. Even before the inscription on the World Heritage List, the historic centre of Colonia had become an important tourism destination. It is worthy to note that the town is located some two hours by car from Montevideo, the country's capital city, and fifty minutes by ship from Buenos Aires, which comprises some ten million inhabitants within its metropolitan area.

The process of gentrification started much before the inscription of the property on the World Heritage List and continued ever since. The charming atmosphere of the historic centre made that people from Montevideo or Buenos Aires used to buy residences as secondary houses, a process that took to the progressive depopulation of the historic centre and to the rise of prices of land and buildings within the area.

Public spaces and architectural heritage are very well preserved in Colonia. The impact of tourism on the public space is easily noticeable; some streets have been closed to motor traffic and have become outdoors cafés or restaurants. Historic houses have generally been bought by people who use them as second residences and many buildings have been given new uses such as shops, accommodation facilities, restaurants or cafés.

Values attributed to the properties are related to the mixture between Portuguese and Spanish influences in urbanism and architecture and in the role played by the town in the process of colonial administration in the area. There are notwithstanding different views: visitors appreciate especially the charming atmosphere of the town, which retains much of the traditional aspect. There is no practically local population within the boundaries of the World Heritage properties; inhabitants of the city recognise the environmental values of the place but are also a sort of visitors of the historic centre. The challenge here is how to stop the process of gentrification, to retain and increase local population and to make them an active stakeholder in the conservation and management processes.

b) Cartagena de Indias, Colombia

The historic centre of Cartagena de Indias and its fortresses was inscribed on the World Heritage List in 1984. The property includes the walled city and a set of fortresses located along the bay. Cartagena was one the most important south-American port over the Spanish period; the richness of the city and the importance of its port are evident in the architectural monuments (churches, convents and private residences) and in the defence system, considered the most impressive ensemble of military architecture constructed by the Spaniards in the Americas.

It is not strange that the historic centre became a main tourism destination. A joint UNESCO-ICOMOS report of 2006 recognised that *“the historic centre has not undergone substantial physical alterations ... while the use of the urban soil has deeply changed”*. The impact of tourism was the main cause of these changes. Up to the 1980s, not luxury hotels existed in the historic centre; the accommodation offering was limited to hostels of lower-middle level hotels. At the beginning of the twenty-first century, five-star hotels and conferences centres have been installed in former convents, skilfully renovated; palaces and historic houses have been restructured to house charming hotels and hostels and some residences were transformed into second houses for national and foreign tourists. The intense demand has increased the market prices, something that made convenient for residents to sell their properties and to leave the walled city.

Tourism has impacted differently diverse areas of the historic centre. In the Centro district, the core area of the historic centre where the main institutional buildings are located, some of the positive effects of tourism can be noticed, such as the improvement

of public spaces, the provision of urban facilities and furniture or new uses for historic buildings. This is the area which exhibits the best state of conservation of the tangible components whereas the intangible ones have changed. The process of gentrification is evident; commercial facilities are related to satisfy the demands from visitors: luxury handicraft, restaurants, bars, night clubs and travel agencies are predominant in this area.

On the other hand, there are the areas where the pressures of tourism are not so evident so far, where traditional local population still lives. The neighbourhood of Getsemaní is the place of residence of low incomes traditional population. Although the state of conservation of buildings is not as good as in the Centro district and there are some problems with infrastructure, we can still notice the traditional ways of life and uses of the public space. Authenticity is noticeable not only with regard to tangible heritage components but to intangible components as well.

Regarding the fortresses located along Cartagena bay, although the architectural structures present an acceptable state of conservation, the surroundings where local communities live do not take advantage of the benefits that the status of World Heritage produces to the site.

Cartagena could be taken as an example of different situations within the boundaries of the historic centre. Economic and environmental sustainability are evident in the districts where the impact of tourism is stronger, while social sustainability is at stake. Conversely, the areas preserving traditional population present deficiencies regarding their state of conservation and quality of life. It is evident that the values that justified the nomination of the property to the World Heritage List are predominantly related to monumental and military architecture; there was less or no consideration, at the time of inscription, for traditional non monumental urban fabric, vernacular architecture, surroundings of monuments outside the city or intangible attributes that bear testimony to traditional ways or life.

c) Quebrada de Humahuaca, Argentina

Quebrada de Humahuaca is a narrow valley some 150 Km long in northern Argentina. It has served as natural communication between the Andean high plateau and the southern valleys over a period of 10000 years; in this sense, Quebrada de Humahuaca is a portion of two significant cultural routes: main Andean pre-Hispanic roads system, and the Spanish Intercontinental Royal Route. The area presents tangible heritage components that testify the occupation by man over a span of 10000 years and, at the same time, a rich intangible heritage that bears testimony of the merging between Amerindian and Spanish traditions.

This is an interesting case to verify how values were recognised and protected over time, some that illustrates on the evolution of the concept of heritage. In the early 1940s the churches were protected as national monuments, in the mid-1970s some villages were protected as a whole at national level and in 2000 a provincial decree protected the whole territory as cultural landscape. In 2003, this portion of a cultural route was inscribed on the World Heritage List.

Although *Quebrada de Humahuaca* was a well-known tourism destination in the country, from the inscription on the List onwards, the number of visitors has increased drastically. Tourism became one of the most important issues related to the management of the property. Even if tourism has become a source of income for entrepreneurs and also for local communities, the lack of an adequate management plan has been the cause of threats, among them the invasion of rural lands by the construction of lodging facilities and the lack of respectful consideration for traditional ways of life.

The project of management plan included, among other specific actions, the strategic plan for integral management, an education project, the tourism development plan, the environment education programme and community involvement workshops. An important principle of the management plan was the involvement of local communities. Although there has been a continuous work, the management plan has been completed two years ago, several years after the inscription on the World Heritage List.

The increase of visitors produced some development but also threats against traditional ways of life. The realization of traditional festivals is currently oriented not only to the local communities but also to satisfy visitors' expectations. Tilcara, one of the main towns in the valley undergoes in January the "invasion" of young people from the provincial capital city who are used to spend weekends in the town. Habits of visitors are often contrary to traditional ways of life of these calm villages, something noticeable in some reactions from local population against the impact of uncontrolled tourism.

This is special case since there are communities that have inhabited the place over generations. It is interesting to mention that when the property was nominated to the World Heritage List, a letter from local communities, especially indigenous population, was attached at the nomination dossier. I will use the contents of that letter to present some conclusions of this presentation

3. Conclusions

a) Role of local communities

In the case of the Argentine property indigenous communities claim to be the fundamental depositary actors of nature in cosmic harmony, a culture that knew how to preserve over centuries their values; they have the right to express their opinion related to the proposal of nominating their place to the World Heritage List.

b) The concept of heritage

The natural and cultural richness of the place is directly related to possibilities of development of indigenous population in the framework of their own system of conceiving social relationships as part of nature. Heritage is not a practice out of context but part of their life; heritage is something alive and community coexist with it.

They consider that heritage does not belong to humanity in a generic sense but are specifically located in space and time; it belongs to specific communities and it is a responsibility of humankind to generate conditions for its proper re-creation, adequate use from the specific worldview of local communities. The use and enhancement of heritage places must be based on interests, capacities and know-how of people who are

active subjects of development. They claim that the benefit produced by the use of environmental resources aims to the improvement of the quality of life of indigenous people.

These three cases illustrate on some issues noticeable not only in Latin American World Heritage properties but also in some other regions. The question could be how we are preserving the attributes and the values of these sites, how local communities are involved in the processes of protection, conservation and management and how those attributes and values will be passed on to future generations.