

THE CONTRIBUTION OF 1972 CONVENTION TO LOCAL DEVELOPMENT

César Moreno-Triana

Head of the Unit for Latin America and the
Caribbean, World Heritage Centre, UNESCO

*(I thank Giovanni Boccardi, focal point for sustainable development
at the World Heritage Centre, for his support in the writing of this article)*

The outcome document of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20), The Future We Want, was adopted in July 2012 in Brazil. It more than once recognizes the contribution of the cultural and natural heritage to sustainable development and its importance to local and indigenous communities.

Today it is commonly accepted that, in addition to its benefits for the spiritual well-being of people, heritage generates benefits that contribute to the reduction of poverty and inequality. It is also considered evidence of the fact that disaster risks, especially in the poorest countries, are growing due to the degradation of natural resources, neglected rural areas, and uncontrolled urban expansion, while natural and historical areas that are well preserved under traditional knowledge and practices, are more resistant to this type of hazards.

Thus, heritage is a powerful asset for economic development, as it attracts investors and generates stable, decent, well-placed jobs. However, these benefits are not automatic. Collaboration is required by the parties involved: authorities at all levels, private sector, and civil society. There is also a need for a broad vision that is supported by a well-calibrated strategy. UNESCO is making efforts along these lines, implementing its various heritage-related conventions.

In the same year, 2012, one of these instruments, the Convention concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage, marked its fortieth anniversary by holding many activities at the international, regional, national and local levels. The anniversary was the right time to take stock and chart a new path for the future.

The World Heritage Convention is a unique and effective tool, it combines the protection of the natural and cultural heritage, and its scope is practically universal, having been ratified by 191 States. Although its best known aspect is the World Heritage List and its almost 1,000 sites inscribed¹, its contribution goes much further and aims to reach the entire planet and its resources. Regarding challenges, it is worth mentioning that the theme chosen for this anniversary was "World Heritage and Sustainable Development: The Role of Local Communities." The role of communities in the context of world heritage had been the subject of attention from UNESCO for years.

In 2008, the World Heritage Committee launched a participatory process in order to reflect on the future of the Convention, in view of the celebration of its fortieth anniversary. The process of reflection on the future of the



Blue and John Crow Mountains Cultural Landscapes, Jamaica © UNESCO/ M. Marín, 2012

Convention was characterized by a spirit of creativity, cooperation and participation open to all members of the World Heritage community.

The outcome of it was a Strategic Action Plan for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention in the 2012-2022 period, adopted by the 18th session of the Assembly of States Parties to the Convention (UNESCO 2011), which includes the issue of sustainable development in its "Vision for 2022: «international cooperation and shared responsibility under the World Heritage Convention ensure effective conservation and protection of our cultural and natural heritage, promote respect and understanding between communities and cultures of the world, and contribute to sustainable development», and Goal No. 3: «incorporate present and future environmental needs, social cohesion, and the economy into heritage protection and conservation work, which is closely related to the participation of local communities.»

The results obtained during the year were highly enriching. Particularly relevant is the collection of 26 case studies over world heritage properties of various types and regions, which are good examples of the status of implementation of the Convention in the world.² They evidenced that the world heritage and its intrinsic values for present and future generations are an integral, essential part of sustainable development in society at the environmental, social and economic levels.

This presupposes that communities, particularly local interest groups, are closely associated with heritage management under an inclusive and participatory process, which begins with the definition of its values. This incorporation of communities since the stage of identification of properties and definition of Outstanding Universal Value can help prevent, as is often the case, heritage conservation from being perceived as an obstacle to development, totally disconnected from the needs of communities. In this regard, the addition of a fifth "C" under "Communities" in the strategic objectives

of the Convention, at the session of the World Heritage Committee in Christchurch in 2007,³ is a good starting point, although it is necessary to have specific procedures and indicators for governments to fully exploit the potential of heritage for sustainable development, without negatively affecting property conservation.

However, in the Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention, which may be modified as time passes, these elements are not very clearly. Moreover, contributing to sustainable development is not a specific and explicit objective of the Convention, whose main focus is the protection of the Outstanding Universal Value. That is why a proposal to integrate a sustainable-development perspective into the process of the Convention is being formulated, as requested in 2012 by the 36th session of the World Heritage Committee in St. Petersburg, largely fuelled by the results of the anniversary year.

Along with these global processes regarding the relationship between World Heritage and development, other processes are being implemented at the regional level. They include the overall progress made and the peculiarities of each region. This is the case of the Second Periodic Reporting for Latin America and the Caribbean, and its result, the Regional Action Plan, to be developed by the States Parties and submitted for approval by the World Heritage Committee at its thirty-eighth session in Qatar, in June 2014.

The Regional Action Plan contains the results of the Second Periodic Reporting for Latin America and the Caribbean, which was adopted by the World Heritage Committee at its thirty-seventh session in Phnom Penh, in June 2013.

This reporting exercise was a successful turnout: 29 (out of 32) States Parties completed the proposed questionnaire. 122 sites were analyzed, and 179 focal points and managers contributed to its development. This process under the mechanisms of the Convention made it possible to

conduct a true assessment of the situation of the World Heritage in the region and review regional and national priorities. The synergies developed at eight meetings and the constant exchange between different actors will be used to design and implement the Plan.

The guidelines established for the Action Plan include thematic aspects such as:

- Cultural landscapes
- Disaster risk reduction
- Tourism and development
- The Slave Route
- Participatory management plans and evaluation of the effectiveness of mixed World Heritage sites management.
- Formulation of climate change strategies
- Improved resistance to climate change impact on natural World Heritage sites through ecological connectivity
- Transnational initiatives

Other proposed aspects are cross-cutting by nature, such as the poverty reduction in the region.

The capacity building is a strategic goal for the region. It had been established in the First Periodic Reporting and led to the development of specific programmes that have proven to be effective, such as the Caribbean Capacity Building Programme (CCBP) on World Heritage.

In fact, the training of all those involved in heritage conservation will remain a priority on the regional agenda, as it is a prerequisite to deal with tensions between heritage and development. Sustainable development can be achieved only if the necessary tools for the effective implementation of the Convention are developed and utilized.

At the same time, capacity building goes far beyond training, because it involves collaboration between

UNESCO, States Parties, site managers and academia to improve the understanding of the processes related to heritage and development. It is only through this fundamental action that the strategic objectives of the Convention can be achieved.

The process to develop and implement the Action Plan should cover the formulation of training strategies for action in the region and promote the participation of all stakeholders identified. The work that has been done to highlight the contribution of the cultural and natural heritage to sustainable development and community involvement should be definitely reflected in this process.[\[20\]](#)

Notes

¹The World Heritage Committee, at its 38th session scheduled for Qatar in June 2014, will probably exceed this symbolic number of inscriptions on the World Heritage List.

²World Heritage, Benefits Beyond Borders, UNESCO, 2012.

³The strategic objectives of the Convention, known as the four "Cs" (credibility, conservation, capacities, and communication), were adopted and contained in the Budapest Declaration on World Heritage in 2002.