

Inclusive Museums and International Conventions: the Role of Heritage with particular reference to Africa

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Heritage is often a contested domain wherever or whatever it may be, in the Museum, sites, monuments, landscapes or even in our minds. This is so as heritage is often the means by which we as human beings define ourselves, define others, relate with others, as well as include or exclude others.

Museums in particular have become important places of “definition”, of identity creation and at times even places of exclusion. However the tendency now has been to develop museums seen to be inclusive; that one that speak with many voices to many. Some of the Museums have even become world heritage sites on their own right or and many of the world heritage sites are seen as or are museums. Thus many museums are also promoters of the various international conventions, especially UNESCO conventions that among other things try to promote unity and understanding among humanity despite the diverse nature of world and its humanity.

In Africa, there are many world heritage sites that are either museum on their own right or that are run by museums. Most of these sites or museums are not only recognized due to their outstanding universal value as heritage worth recognizing but are also embedded in the understanding of the local issues and at times are a representation long standing relations between people as well as people and their environment.

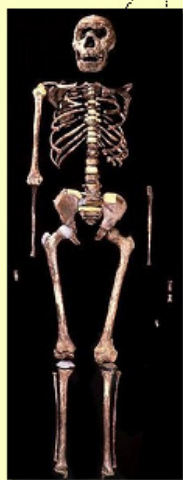
International conventions that are meant to acknowledge and appreciate similarities, differences and achievements are particularly relevant within the African museum environment, a continent that represents all the shades of human history and development. Africa is the cradle of human kind, a continent that saw early civilizations, experienced slave trade and colonization, discrimination and exploitation and subsequently independence and the call for renaissance.

While Africa is a continent rich in heritage with this long history, the continent is not only disadvantaged in terms of the economic development but also in the representation of its heritage in the world heritage map, a result of the colonially created impression of a dark continent with no history before the arrival of the colonial power.

¹ N.R. As imagens utilizadas integram a apresentação em *power point* realizada pelo Dr. George Abungu na Aula Magna e são de sua propriedade.

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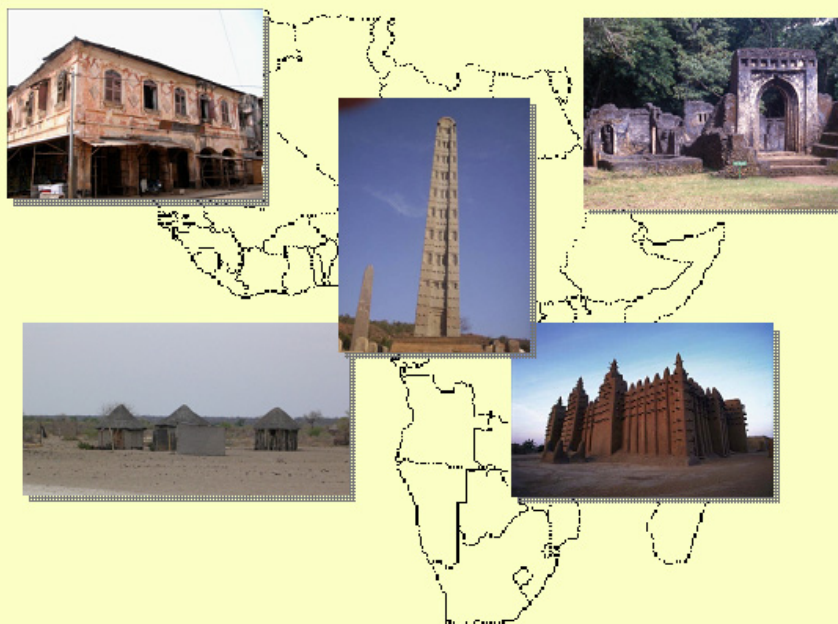
Africa: cradle of humanity ...that gave birth to immense diversity



Landscapes



Architecture



People



This discriminatory approach therefore for year shaped the way Africa was seen in the world. However this also came to influence the African heritage institutions' approach to their heritage use and presentation after independence. Thus apart from being exclusive places that museums were during the colonial times, African museums became inclusive spaces and places long before the western based museums even imagined such approaches.

Museums and heritage places in Africa started to play direct and relevant roles in peoples lives, the way they were perceived, the way they presented and imagined themselves as well as built their identities and reconstructed their histories. Some of the heritage places have not only become places of memories, negative or positive but as places of identity reconstruction, reconstruction of past histories, national identity and cohesion as well as places of negotiation for power, space and economic wellbeing of peoples. Museums have not been exempted in this, making them true inclusive institutions. The various international conventions have in one way or the other helped museums and heritage institutions in the continent to look and be inclusive in their approach. In particular the UNESCO 1972 Convention has been of great relevance in raising the status of African heritage sites and drawing much required attention to the continents' heritage.

The listing of sites in the World Heritage list is done under UNESCO's 1972 Convention, known as "*the Convention Concerning Protection of World Cultural and Natural Heritage*", or: "***the World Heritage Convention***".

Established on 16th November 1945, immediately after the Second World War (WWII) UNESCO came into force on 4th November 1946 with a vision that Education, Science, Culture and Communication could be the means to build peace create conditions for true dialogue, based upon respect for commonly shared values and the dignity of each society and its culture(s). Further it was envisaged to achieve a global vision of sustainable development based upon observance of: human rights, mutual respect and alleviation of poverty. The main issue when stressed being "**Promote dialogue among cultures and civilizations**".

Since then UNESCO has come up with various international instruments including conventions, charters, agreements that have tried to bring common understanding and cooperation among peoples. In this UNESCO has encouraged appreciation and understanding of human diversity as well as its appreciation putting all cultures at par at least on paper. The idea of embracing all cultures or cultural diversity is critical and defines the spirit of this convention. Thus, the Convention of the Protection and Promotion of Cultural Diversity has brought into play concepts such as "Global Alliance for Cultural Diversity" that call for a new partnership between public and private actors to support local cultural industries. This type of approach is very relevant to the African scenario where local cultural industries have potential to positively transform peoples' lives and yet this has not been the case. Museums as custodians of the heritage including cultural products, through inclusive approach can therefore play a major role in shaping the future of the continents economy, especially through popularizing and promoting cultural products.

The concept of embracing cultural diversity is so central to the present world view that a comparison has been made of its importance to the importance of biodiversity to nature. Thus it has been stated that **Cultural Diversity is one of the roots of development, as necessary for humankind as biodiversity is to nature**. If this is indeed the case, then humanity cannot disagree with the importance of diversity. However human beings are seen not to have been lovers of diversity especially among themselves and differences have been seen over the years as the cause of wars. This is indeed one reason why UNESCO was founded; to unlock the positive nature of diversity and demystify differences. Probably the most famous quote associated with the founding of UNESCO sums this up:


Since war begins in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defenses of peace must be constructed" - UNESCO '*founding fathers*' (1945).

The sharing of heritage with Outstanding Universal Values is seen as part of creating this international partnership and common understanding to avoid war, promote peace and share in the common heritage of humanity.

In many circumstances the world has taken a single voice in condemning acts of cultural or human rights abuses through UNESCO, as was the case with Afghanistan, or as


regards the heritage of Iraq after the American-led 'invasion'.

The Convention Concerning the protection of Cultural and Natural Heritage is one of the most popular and widely acceded Conventions. The convention was set up to take into consideration what was considered the heritage of humanity. In this context, World Heritage was defined as "Cultural & Natural Heritage of Outstanding Universal Value", as per the *Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention*.



Convention Concerning the Protection of Cultural and Natural Heritage



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The aims of the convention are clearly defined in the Operational Guidelines for the implementation of the World Heritage Convention and include:

- inscription of properties on the World Heritage List and the List of World Heritage in Danger;
- the protection and conservation of World Heritage properties;
- the granting of International Assistance under the World Heritage Fund;
- and
- the mobilization of national and international support in favor of the Convention.

The **Custodians of the Convention** are: the *Intergovernmental Committee for the Protection of Cultural and Natural Heritage* or the "**World Heritage Committee**" assisted by the **World Heritage Centre** (permanent Secretariat of the World Heritage Committee)

There are **Advisory Bodies to the World Heritage Committee** that include the International Council of Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS), the International Centre for the Study of the Restoration & Preservation of Cultural Property (ICCROM) and the International Union for the Conservation of Nature & Natural Resources (IUCN). At national level, site managers, stakeholders and other partners are among the entities that advise the Committee.

The safeguarding of the sites is specified and is the responsibility of the states parties. These are done through national initiatives: domestication of the convention and appropriate legal frameworks and Technical Assistance from UNESCO to the State Party. It is important to note that failure to ensure proper protection of such heritage has its consequences. Managing these site are not cheap neither are they easy and as such many

developing countries find their sites listed in danger lists. Thus the Operation Guidelines states that, if the State Party fails to meet the conditions of conservation, and the property is threatened by serious and specific danger, the Committee may consider putting it on the **List of World Heritage in Danger**. When the outstanding universal value of the property is destroyed, the Committee will consider deleting it from the World Heritage List

Listing on Danger List, or De-listing from the World Heritage List are considered shameful, and so is it is often resisted by State Parties.


Challenges

- Eurocentric approach to the identification of significance based on the outstanding universal value
- Lack of appreciation from governments of the role of heritage in national development
- Conflicts between Development and Conservation
- Inadequate or outdated Legal Frameworks within the continent
- Lack of adequate resources
- Conflict between traditional practices (including in conservation) and western prescribed treatments
- Inadequate representation within the Committee by non-Europeans, and 'Yes men'
- Eurocentric definition of Outstanding Universal Value (and as such site significance) particularly by the Advisory bodies
- Neglect and lack of commitment (prestige and appreciation)
- Lack of community involvement
- Population pressure
- Inability to tap and promote local knowledge
- War and subsequent destruction and looting: all of which are a recipe for disaster and conducive for creating an environment where poverty thrives.

One cannot maintain a heritage on behalf of the world when confronted with poverty and conflict.

Opportunities:


1. National identity




National identity


Great Zimbabwe






Brimstone Hill, St Kitts





Le Morne, Mauritius

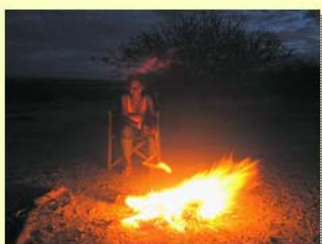


2. Tourism

Tourism



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3. Knowledge generation

Knowledge generation



... and dissemination



4. Conflict resolution
5. Tolerance and Human Rights

Conflict Resolution & Tolerance



Robben Island
one site:
many layers



6. Access to heritage rights
7. International cooperation
8. Pride of place

Telling the Story



9. Intellectual debate

Intellectual debate



Job creation / poverty alleviation



Cape Coast Castle, Ghana



Barbados Museum



Gorée Fort, Senegal



Fort Jesus Museum, Kenya



Job creation / poverty alleviation



Making the most of
our heritage...



Thank you - Asante Sana.