



Afterword:

AN ACADEMIC PERSPECTIVE\*

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To many, the idea that nature and culture are distinct from one another and could be managed and sustained without reference to the interconnections between them would be a strange one. Indeed, such a perspective is now generally perceived to be an artefact of a world view based on notions of human exceptionalism to justify exploitative and extractive relations between humans and their environments and frequently resulted in hierarchical, unequal and exploitative relations between different groups of people, who were perceived to be culturally and racially different from one another. Throughout the twentieth century, such views led to an increasingly siloed set of professional fields developed to manage a range of natural and cultural 'resources' - understood very much through the lens of their apparent values for human utilisation - and in doing so, in many cases have exacerbated processes of environmental and cultural degradation.

Today, we live with the legacies of these developments, which in practice mean a fragmented system of international and national policies, laws and professional practices in which attempts to preserve one specific form of heritage may in fact hinder or at best trouble attempts to preserve another. In light of the significant global and regional challenges affecting the environment and the driving forces affecting both cultural and natural heritage, including climate change, land use, urbanisation, and demographic changes, new and more effectively coordinated policies to manage and conserve landscapes - understood holistically as encompassing both nature and culture and the inter-relations between them - are urgently required.

The problems arising from a fragmented approach to the conservation and management of culture and nature are familiar to many of the global majority, including many of the world's Indigenous peoples, who have long called into question such practices. For example, questions of the intersection of cultural heritage with environmental health are more keenly felt, when one perceives the land itself to be a part of one's identity, and the plants, animals and natural forces to be one's kin. Similarly, we know that climate change impacts the world's most disadvantaged peoples most disproportionately, highlighting the important connections between environmental and social justice.

A number of international non-governmental organisations have also recently drawn attention to these problems. For example, parties to the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) noted in 2009 the need for closer integration of work on biological and cultural diversity conservation, leading to the development of a UNESCO - CBD Joint Programme between biological and cultural diversity, which culminated in their 2014 Florence Declaration on the links between biological and cultural diversity. Also, the World Heritage Leadership (WHL) programme is a partnership between ICCROM, IUCN, and the Norwegian Ministry of Climate and the Environment, in collaboration with the World Heritage Centre and ICOMOS, which aims to draw attention to the links between nature and culture and help to improve conservation and management practices for both

Despite this, the precise mechanisms by which the interdependencies and interactions between people, culture and nature might be effectively protected and managed have not been well articulated. The inter-relationship between human rights and the environment have been particularly highlighted as a strategic priority for the Council of Europe. Loss of biodiversity, climate change, extinction of species, pollution and the overall degradation of the Earth's ecosystems have a profound global impact on the enjoyment of human rights and require the widest possible cooperation efforts, world-wide.

As Europe's leading human rights organisation, the Council of Europe is uniquely placed to provide guidance on these issues. It is only through taking an integrated/holistic and cross-sectoral approach based on an understanding of natural diversity, cultural environment and climate as inter-related and understood in context that we will be able to address the crises which equally threaten the cultural and natural environment.

It is now widely acknowledged and understood that humans have modified the climate and environment to such a significant extent that it is no longer possible to assume that the geology, ecology and climate of the planet will remain in a stable state, even over the scale of individual human lifetimes. This suggests that we must accept some degree of environmental and physical change as inevitable - including the loss of some cultural and natural resources. Heritage management has conventionally pitched itself against such changes through active processes of conservation, but a focus on landscapes and integrated understandings of cultural and natural values holds much potential for refocussing heritage management efforts towards working productively with, rather than against, inevitable change. New management concepts such as 'adaptive release', defined as 'reflecting an active decision to accommodate and interpret the dynamic transformation of a heritage asset and its associated values and significance, with reference to wider landscape settings' (DeSilvey et al 2021)<sup>1</sup> and drawing on the work of the Heritage Futures research programme (Harrison et al 2020)<sup>2</sup> are particularly relevant here. Equally, such approaches suggest the need to think beyond the conservation of individual species, objects, places and practices, to focus instead on the values that arise from the connections and interdependencies between them.

Based on the Council of Europe's human rights and participatory approach, and its Conventions in the field of culture, nature and landscape, the "L.I.N.K.E.D." document introduces a number of relevant actions and tools that can be used at national, regional or local level, as appropriate, to strengthen the inseparable links between people, culture and nature. These suggest a holistic approach in policymaking, management, research and practice with an emphasis on integrating environmental awareness and justice and addressing social and economic inequalities. In light of the fact that the cultural and natural environment are to a large extent managed by the same measures and instruments, the aim of the guidelines is to highlight new ways of combining and/or integrating these measures to better protect and expand cultural, natural and landscape diversity, which is vital for sustainable development and the well-being of our planet.

\* The opinions expressed in this Afterword are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the official policy of the Council of Europe.

<sup>1</sup> Caitlin DeSilvey, Harald Fredheim, Hannah Fluck, Rosemary Hails, Rodney Harrison, Ingrid Samuel & Amber Blundell (2021) *When Loss is More: From Managed Decline to Adaptive Release, The Historic Environment: Policy & Practice*, 12:3-4, 418-433, DOI: 10.1080/17567505.2021.1957263

<sup>2</sup> Rodney Harrison, Caitlin DeSilvey, Cornelius Holtorf, Sharon Macdonald, Nadia Bartolini, Esther Breithoff, Harald Fredheim, Antony Lyons, Sarah May, Jennie Morgan, and Sefryn Penrose (2020) *Heritage Futures: Comparative Approaches to Natural and Cultural Heritage Practices*. London: UCL Press