A Cultural Heritage Manifesto

Cultural heritage is an expression of the ways of living, developed by a community and passed on from generation to generation, including customs, practices, places, objects, artistic expressions and values. Cultural heritage is often expressed as either intangible or tangible cultural heritage. (ICOMOS, 2002)

Cultural heritage must continue to be an essential component of a successful society. It should play a pivotal role as a driver of development and of sustainable, ethical tourism – a major global industry – and be seen as a key component of our cultural identity and sense of well-being.

- It embodies a spirit of place and can provide inspiration for the communities and people to which it belongs, forming an archive of their shared past;
- It can provide beauty and harmony that have beneficial impacts on the well-being of communities;
- It enhances social capital in contributing to common actions and places related to social identities and pride.

Crucially, its value can lie in the ordinary as well as in the extraordinary.

Cultural heritage has a profound impact on our lives, but it is vulnerable, highly vulnerable, as we have seen so vividly in recent times in Syria, Yemen and Mali.

In its 50th anniversary year, ICOMOS-UK calls for a new approach to the way we all sustain, promote and benefit from cultural heritage.

Cultural heritage must be seen as a cross cutting theme, embedded in all aspects of human activity and sustainable development.

It must be acknowledged as a key source of resilience for communities and wider society.

The profile of cultural heritage should be enhanced as a major economic activity comparable to those of the natural environment or the arts.

Our Vision for cultural heritage is for a society where:

- Cultural heritage is not something apart to be protected, but is a living and dynamic strand of the way we live, work and develop;

- There is a broad understanding that cultural heritage encompasses the tangible and the intangible, cultural landscapes and individual monuments and sites, as well as processes and associations;

- The major benefits of cultural heritage, in terms of well-being, health and sense of identity, are available to all;

- Civil society, in partnership with diverse communities and individuals, has an established role in identifying and negotiating the place of heritage in times of social, economic and environmental change;

- There is a full realisation of the crucial role cultural heritage plays in sustainable development, in the resilience of societies, and in our understanding of where we have come from and to where we wish to go;

- The symbiotic relationship between culture and nature is respected and managed;

- The basic need for communities to perceive, protect, enhance and create beauty and harmony in their surroundings is celebrated, as well as the role of cultural heritage in their delivery.

The Way Forward:
We call for an integrated and cross-cutting approach to cultural heritage:

To realise our vision, cultural heritage must be embedded in all aspects of our lives. We call on central and local governments, agencies, professional bodies and institutions, international research programmes, architects, building designers, developers and the public to:

- Put cultural heritage at the centre of decision-making about our society, communities and the environment, and fully integrate it into governance;

- Demonstrate how cultural heritage contributes to major local and national thematic priorities;

- Ensure plans and economic investments are 'cultural heritage proofed' and that cultural heritage is a dimension of all policy areas such as education, community development, healthcare, agriculture, creative arts, housing, the rural environment and business;

- Integrate cultural heritage into development practices, in order to promote inclusive and equitable, sustainable development, that generates employment, stimulates localism, and fosters entrepreneurship;

- Analyse how cultural heritage can contribute to the quality of life, and strengthen the resilience of communities and societies;

- Promote place-based planning that acknowledges the way cultural heritage relates to beauty in towns, the countryside and all places between, which are vital to the ethos of local communities;

- Support sustainable, ethical cultural tourism;

- Give cultural heritage as high a profile as the natural environment, to which it is so inextricably linked;

- Acknowledge the way traditional knowledge and practices contribute to a sustainable environment;

- Protect and enhance cultural assets, including processes that may have an impact on, or constitute, crucial, non-renewable social capital.

1965-2015

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The photographs above show some of the UK's renowned cultural heritage sites and landscapes, many of which are UNESCO World Heritage Sites. Top row: from left to right and from top to bottom: Hadrian's Wall (Frontiers of the Roman Empire); Derby Silk Mill (Derwent Valley Mills); Old and New Towns of Edinburgh © Historic Environment Scotland; Stonehenge (Stonehenge, Avebury and Associated Sites). Bottom row: from left to right: St James's Park, Westminster © Gavin Kingcome; Caernarfon Castle (Castles and Town Walls of King Edward in Gwynedd); Cornwall and West Devon Mining Landscape. Design by Badrock Design.