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## Locating culture in sustainable development

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## Locating culture in sustainable development

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The challenge for local governments in the coming decade is to develop ways of engaging with community cultural diversity through integrated local area planning. In doing so integration of the intangible with the tangible illustrators of cultural values becomes a poignant reminder of how object and site centred that we have been so far. Capacity building takes on a different meaning. It is more than working with materials or places. It is going beyond locating the context for cultural change and place making in a dynamic and rapidly globalising world. In doing so the extent to which the practitioners become proficient in their interpersonal skills and acquire the competency for relationship building with the diverse stakeholders at different levels becomes significant.

In rethinking our purpose wherever we are the inevitability of the accelerated pace of globalisation in all its forms provides the challenging background. What is the location of cultural diversity in the context of globalisation? How do we reconcile the global and local, beyond the rhetoric, through our local civic spaces for engagement between all the stakeholders? Where do we see the role of local, regional, state and national institutions as mediators of our sense of place and identity? (Appadurai 2000) The role of civic spaces such as museums, libraries and galleries at local government level for intercultural dialogue and sustainable cultural development is yet to be adequately debated and developed. Major meetings of the World Commission for Culture and Development, both held in Manila in mid 1990s called for an integrated approach to culture and nature in understanding sustainable development. But the binary of nature and culture continues to plague our local policies.

### How do we reconcile the global and local, beyond the rhetoric, through our local civic spaces for engagement between all the stakeholders?

First and foremost we need to interrogate the extent to which we have the capacity to take on these challenges and whether or not the programmes we implement have started transforming their strategic approaches through relevant and measurable community inputs and engagement. The possibilities through demonstration projects in countries such as Vietnam have proven useful. My work in Vietnam is started with inputs into the final report of the World Commission for Culture and Development. What impressed most people is the strong commitment that Vietnam demonstrated for the Stockholm Action Plan on Cultural Policies in Development and to Local Agenda 21.

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To begin with Vietnamese were keen on how culture reflects values - economic, social and environmental - providing a humanist perspective as enunciated in the Pérez de Cuéllar Report of the World Commission on Culture and Development "Our Creative Diversity", '...it is culture that defines how people relate to nature and their physical environment, to the earth and to the cosmos, and through which we express our attitudes to and beliefs in other forms of life, both animal and plant.' This appreciation of culture and the diversity of cultural expression across time and space can be a foundation for social empowerment and development into the future. In particular Vietnamese popularised the culture in development paradigm from Our Creative Diversity. 'Development divorced from its human or cultural context is growth without a soul. Economic development in its full flowering is part of a people's culture...Unlike the physical environment, where we dare not improve on the best that nature provides, culture is the fountain of our progress and creativity.'

What has been critical for developing a strategic community engagement approach is the preservation of tangible heritage and safeguarding the intangible heritage values with a holistic conservation ethic that informs the formative holistic paradigm of sustainable cultural development.

In 2000, the local and provincial governments in Quang Ninh Province, especially Ha Long Bay areas, came together to address the challenges of reconciling two non-negotiable principles in a country trying to address Millennium Development Goals. Conservation is non-negotiable. Community development is non-negotiable. The way forward had to be explored. The methodology that was developed bringing the two principles together is sustainable cultural development. This is the beginning of an on-going project without an end, like all living and organic culture in development projects, the Ha Long Ecomuseum, which informs over a dozen demonstration projects including the Cua Van Floating Cultural Centre, the world's first such space on the sea.

In October 2006 the Prime Minister of Vietnam was so impressed by the capacity and proven results of the culture in development method that he inscribed the cluster of projects in the different local government areas under the rubric of the Ha Long Ecomuseum, including a local government project dedicated to the living heritage of fishing communities, on the list of National Museums of Vietnam.

Ha Long Bay, Ha Long City and the part of Quang Ninh Province which surrounds it is an area of rapid economic and urban growth. Quang Ninh, which has a population of just over a million, together with Hai Phong and Ha Noi, forms a large triangular area of dense population and economic activity which is developing rapidly. The main Coal mining area of Viet Nam with reserves exceeding eight billion tons lies immediately beside the Bay and large amounts of limestone, kaolin, clay and sand are extracted to supply an important construction material industry. Large merchant ships cross the Bay en route to the two large ports of Hai Phong and Cai Lan. These and five other smaller ports, cater for an export trade, which is projected to more than quadruple in the next decade. The Bay itself supports a valuable fishing and seafood industry and attracts large numbers of tourists.

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The number of visitors from 1994 to 2007 has grown from 120,000 to nearly 2.1 million. If this rate of growth is sustained, the local government areas will attract in excess of 3 million domestic and foreign tourists per annum by the year 2020. The continuing reconstruction of the Vietnamese economy in line with the doi moi reform process launched in 1986 and designed to lead the country towards a more market orientated economy is already proving to be successful in addressing poverty and enhancing the quality of life for the people of Viet Nam. Many new factories, industrial zones and export processing zones have begun operating in recent years. As participation by private industry is expanding further and markets are becoming more open, expanding commercial activity in the Ha Long area is placing further pressure on the Bay's fragile environment and ecosystems.

Increasing commercial activity and restructuring, urbanization and greater levels of disposable income for a growing number of people have led to a rise in social problems and placed pressure on the culture and values of the population of Ha Long City and its surrounding area. Wider exposure to international markets has brought about fluctuations and changes in local employment and widened the gap between those who have benefited and those unable to take advantage of the new opportunities. Mindful of the danger of unrestrained and un-coordinated development, the local and provincial authorities jointly developed a 'Master Plan for the Development of Ha Long Bay to the Year 2020'. It provides a coordinated planning framework to manage the development that could affect the Bay. Nevertheless, at the present time and for the foreseeable future, many of the foregoing activities conflict with efforts to manage the sustainable development of the marine resources and Outstanding Universal Values of Ha Long Bay as a World Heritage Area. Clearly identifiable examples of direct conflicts are the increasing numbers of tourists and the corresponding demand for wider access to caves and grottoes, expansion of commercial shipping and tourist vessels, fishing by using illegal methods and coal mining. Such activities, as they are currently managed, are incompatible with the conservation of the Bay's environment, biodiversity and landscape values.

**The most important intervention made by the local community stakeholder groups is the reclamation of the control of their cultural values through the Ha Long Ecomuseum project which brings people and their heritage together.**

A framework of legislation has been put in place by the Vietnamese Government and the Quang Ninh Provincial People's Committee to regulate activities across the Bay and its hinterland. It lays down environmental conditions for the operation of industrial activities and sets safety and hygiene standards for tourist and transport activities. Working closely with Ha Long City and other nearby local authorities, the management is actively pursuing measures to control and reduce the environmental threat of water and atmospheric pollution of the Bay from solid, liquid and gaseous waste products. Thus an integrated approach is envisaged to bring cooperation and coordination across the local departments and civic bodies

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The most important intervention made by the local community stakeholder groups is the reclamation of the control of their cultural values through the Ha Long Ecomuseum project which brings people and their heritage together. While the external heritage model brings in a dichotomy between the natural and cultural, validating the natural for the recognition of World Heritage values, the local self-empowerment process through the Ecomuseum has been able to mainstream a local holistic approach to the total environment, challenging the imposition of an externality on local values.

The integrated systems concept or Ecomuseum views the entire Bay and its hinterland as a living museum and employs an 'interpretive' approach to its management. Interpretive management sees the components and processes of the Bay and its hinterland of Quang Ninh Province as continuously interacting with each other in a constantly changing equilibrium. By intensive research and monitoring, local heritage workers seek to 'interpret' what is happening to that equilibrium and to make carefully planned interventions to change the balance of the components when necessary. An important feature of this approach is that it views human activity, past and present, as fundamental components of the total environmental resource. The culture, history, traditions and activities of the human population on and around the Bay are as much a part of the heritage as the caves and plants on the islands and are in continuous interaction with it.

## Human and natural ecosystems are interdependent.

The Ecomuseum assumes that all human and natural ecosystems are living, developing organisms that cannot be 'preserved' in a particular isolated state and that human and natural ecosystems are interdependent. The ultimate goal of conservation is the sustainable development of all aspects of the province. Moreover, as a national demonstration project it is resulting in multiplier effects in not only Vietnam, but also Thailand, Cambodia, Philippines, South Korea, China, and Australia.

In societies that are committed to the principles of inclusiveness, locally-grounded organisations are critical mechanisms for effective advocacy, networking, people-centred research and locally controlled infrastructure development. In addition to the promotion of inclusiveness, community networks facilitate better economic outcomes (Galla, 1995).

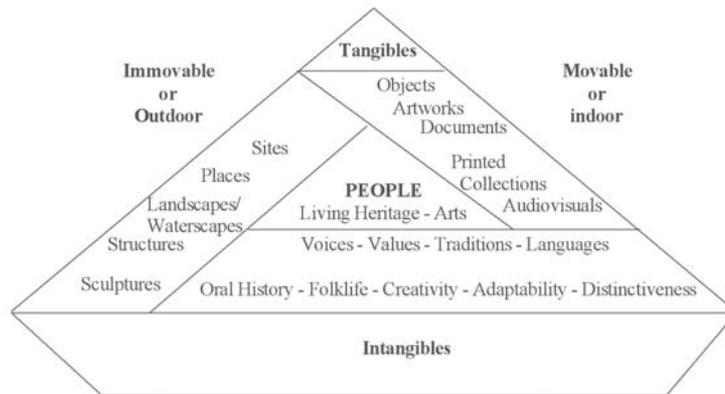
<p><b>ADVOCACY</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Promotion of membership interests in cultural development</li> <li>• Access to IGO/INGO cultural agencies by the museum/heritage agency membership</li> <li>• Use of media including diversity of regional resources for museum and heritage education in different languages</li> <li>• Formation of pressure groups for lobbying with government and non-government agencies on critical issues: e.g. Prevention of illicit traffic in cultural Property; cultural diversity promotion etc.</li> <li>• Promotion of principles of participation by membership</li> <li>• Locally/Community-grounded post-colonial museum and heritage practice</li> </ul>	<p><b>NETWORKING</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sharing human and infrastructure resources</li> <li>• Enhancing communication channels through newsletter, workshops, forums, digital media and symposia</li> <li>• Working towards equitable cultural practice</li> <li>• Forming collaborative strategic partnerships</li> <li>• Preventing single member co-options and marginalisation on councils and committees</li> <li>• Providing mechanisms of support for delegates on policy-making bodies</li> <li>• Articulating regional, state and national networks with international agencies</li> </ul>
<p><b>RESEARCH</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Enabling cultural control and copyright</li> <li>• Maintaining ethical and negotiated standards of professional practice and research</li> <li>• Consultation, participation and negotiation</li> <li>• Language diversity</li> <li>• Gender, youth and aging concerns</li> <li>• Environmental concerns and sustainable development</li> <li>• Regional linkages (E.g. Pacific-Asia)</li> <li>• Input into policy papers of IGOs and INGOs</li> <li>• integration of tangible and intangible heritage</li> </ul>	<p><b>RESOURCES</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Access to infrastructure development</li> <li>• Making training accessible</li> <li>• Incentive funding – fund raising</li> <li>• Use and development of regionally based resource centres</li> <li>• Promoting corporate support for sponsorship and so on</li> <li>• Maximising on available resources through cooperation and coordination</li> </ul>

An integrated local area planning practice is based on a holistic paradigm and is necessarily achieved through collaborative endeavours. Understanding values from the contextual standpoint and locating culture in sustainable development requires integrated approaches to both the tangible and intangible resources as illustrated in the following diagram. (Galla, 1993).

**An integrated local area planning practice is based on a holistic paradigm and is necessarily achieved through collaborative endeavours.**

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## HOLISTIC REPRESENTATION OF CULTURAL AND HERITAGE RESOURCES



**Total Natural & Cultural Environment**

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In recent transformative projects, the developmental action plans are facilitated through systematic integrated local area planning with the primary stakeholder voice being articulated using community driven methodologies. It is understood that integrated local area planning is where a community grounded approach is used to plan for an integration of resourcing, service design and delivery, within a distinct locality delineated physically in settlement terms, as well as by community of interest. It can include planning for single issues or programs at the local level or across agencies and their programs. It can be integrated with physical planning or it can focus on social planning or cultural planning issues alone. Local area planning can be addressed across larger areas, such as local government authorities or districts, by combining a series of local area plans into one planning project.

### The goal is to contribute to more effective community building, by strengthening local capacity for action.

The planning approaches taken involve full participation by the local community, drawing on local skills and expertise, and providing for empowerment of the local community through the plan's development and implementation. In developing a community based plan the opportunities to include strategies that empower local communities are prioritised, making them better able to provide for their own needs. The goal is to contribute to more effective community building, by strengthening local capacity for action. The empowerment model for local planning used in these initiatives:

- recognises that local people are well placed to know what they need
- recognises that values and priorities vary from place to place
- strategically places resources to maximise access by local people
- gives local people resources to meet their own needs
- gives control over resources to local communities
- develops the management skills of the local community

The case studies of recent projects in the Pacific and Asia demand changes in the way we approach in integrating culture in development. The following models of interaction in community engagement provide an overview of the transformations that are needed. Model I is the most familiar for most people. It is a one way street with very limited engagement with the voices of people. Model II is becoming popular and there are many show and tell presentations which enable us to scope the possibilities. However, Model III is the most challenging as it requires a mind shift in the way heritage conservation is conceptualised, understood and practiced. (Galla, 2008).

## MODEL OF ENGAGEMENT

<b>Project Concern</b>	<b>Model I – Participation as Consultation</b>	<b>Model II - Participation as Strategic Partnership</b>	<b>Model III - Participation as Community Cultural / Action</b>
Who initiates the project?	Usually external researcher / specialist	Community specialist or the external researcher/specialist	Community cultural specialist /elders/curators/activists
What is the extent of community participation?	Community members or groups are informants	Community members or groups are co-workers in project development & outcomes	Community cultural control & development
What is the extent of community involvement?	Usually terminates upon the professional receiving the requisite amount of information. Characterised by limitation to the initial involvement stage	Community involvement is on-going from planning, through implementation and evaluation stages. Assumes a role for the community in joint decision making	Community control leads to on-going community cultural leadership and cultural reclamation
Where is the location of expertise?	Expertise resides with the external agency which is empowered with the knowledge.	Expertise resides with both the professional and the community ⇒ mutual empowerment	Expertise is part of shared community cultural heritage and values
What is the nature of information flow and heritage communication?	One way from the community to the external professional	All participants generate information and contribute to joint project development; information flow is between and among all participants	Community grounded information from generation to generation with strengthening cultural self-esteem, continuity of culture and heritage
Is the process empowering?	Community is disempowered	Community is empowered to participate in the mainstream	Community is able to continue in the mainstream through self-empowerment.
Intangible Heritage	First Voice is marginalised or even silenced	Space for articulating First Voice	First Voice is the driver

The last two decades in particular have seen the reworking of cultural policies from a hegemonic “first world” construct into an inclusive post-colonial practice, which has resulted in a transformative cultural discourse. In this process, engagement with the increasingly important concept of the intangible heritage, standing alongside the long-established approach to the physical heritage, has been challenging for the ‘establishment’ working in heritage management, whether institutions, organisations or professional workers in the sector.

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