

Annex 4: The Role of Indigenous and Customary Knowledges in Nature-Culture Linkage

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■ Abstract

This paper reports some reflections on our participation in the Capacity Building Workshop on Nature-Culture Linkages in Heritage Conservation in Asia and the Pacific, Sacred Landscapes, in September 2017, at the University of Tsukuba. The workshop explored the nature-culture linkages for integrated conservation as part of the World Heritage Capacity Building Programme. The learning framework revolved around, among other activities, a fieldtrip to the Sacred Sites and Pilgrimage Routes in the Kii Mountain Range, World Heritage Cultural Landscape since 2004. In contemplating the capacity building process, we present our reflection regarding three areas relevant to Indigenous and customary practices - governance, language and stewardship - in order to contribute to strengthening nature-culture linkages in the Asia-Pacific region. We also present some challenges for the integration of the sacred into the management of World Heritage sites. We conclude that a greater understanding of Indigenous and customary knowledges and their historical development within World Heritage processes will enable more effective management of heritage sites in the Asia-Pacific region.

KEY WORDS: Nature-culture linkages, ecosystem, Indigenous, traditional knowledges, Kii Mountains

■ 1. Introduction

1.1 Overview of traditional and customary knowledges in World Heritage Sites

For this paper, while we recognise that nature-culture linkages are found across many tenure and governance types, from protected areas declared as national parks to local community-based conserved areas declared as Indigenous¹ territories, we focus

on World Heritage to reflect the content of the learning experience undertaken in the Kii Mountains Range World Heritage Cultural Landscape, Japan. In November 2015, the World Heritage Committee adopted a Policy on the integration of a sustainable development perspective into the processes of the World Heritage Convention (hereafter the 'Policy') to provide guidance and future vision on integrating

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¹We capitalise 'Indigenous' to reflect self-determining rights, such that in Australia and Canada it is offensive to refer to Indigenous peoples without it (see for an Australian example the NSW Department of Education and Training 2005 and Canadian example from International Journal of Indigenous Health 2018).

World Heritage into the Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development (UNESCO 2015). An approach integrating sustainable development can enhance the Outstanding Universal Value of World Heritage Sites, nevertheless it is imperative to involve people and local communities in the policy implementation, such that paragraphs 21 and 22 of the Policy are dedicated to “respecting, consulting and involving indigenous peoples and local communities” (UNESCO 2015, p. 6-7).

The Policy also states, under Paragraph 11, that the “linkages between the conservation of cultural and natural heritage and the various dimensions of sustainable development will enable all those concerned to better engage with World Heritage” (UNESCO 2015 p. 3). The University of Tsukuba have helped to underscore the importance of Indigenous and customary knowledges- the living bodies of generational knowledge gained through connections to natural, bio-physical, spiritual and cultural resources (Raymond-Yakoubian, Raymond-Yakoubian & Moncrieff 2017- and their contribution to World Heritage Sites. By this, the UNESCO Chair on Nature-Culture Linkages in Heritage Conservation at the University hosted the Capacity Building Workshop on Nature-Culture Linkages in Heritage Conservation in Asia and the Pacific (CBWNCL) on the theme Sacred Landscapes, in September 2017. The CBWNCL contributes to the World Heritage Capacity Building Programme by training heritage practitioners from the natural and cultural heritage sectors in Asia and the Pacific on integrated approaches to conservation.

Despite the focus on inclusive methodologies to incorporate Indigenous and customary knowledges, there is still a global trend towards narrowing or inhibiting understanding of what those knowledges are (Wilk 1995). For instance, under Aichi Target 18 of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) traditional knowledges and knowledge-holders are to be respected and integrated into the participatory functions of implementation of the Convention outcomes². However, while highlighting the importance of, for example, linguistic diversity in conservation knowledge production, indicators are yet to be finalised to gauge progress (Secretariat of the CBD 2014).

Furthermore, the 2015 joint IUCN-ICOMOS

publication, *Connecting Practice*, (IUCN and ICOMOS 2015) highlights the gap between nature-culture sectors and recommends greater awareness of Indigenous and customary practices that contribute to World Heritage management and governance. Therefore, the role of the CBWNCL is even more vital to strengthen the capacity of Indigenous and customary peoples, where traditional knowledges have been “empirically-tested, applied, and validated...by peoples and local communities...and are being revitalized through contemporary problem-solving” (UNESCO 2016, n.p.) to engage in World Heritage management. The CBWNCL can also deeply engage with those parallel processes that contribute to the conservation of landscapes on a vast scale (Borrini-Feyerabend et al. 2012).

1.2 Brief description of the CBWNCL

The CBWNCL 2017 was dedicated to Sacred Landscapes from the Asia-Pacific region in particular, with a visit to the Kii Mountains Range World Heritage Cultural Landscape in south-east Japan as a core component. The CBWNCL is a four-year programme that promotes the training of multidisciplinary aspects of World Heritage management, tied through nature-culture linkages and aimed at strengthening research capacity in the Asia-Pacific region (University of Tsukuba 2016). The CBWNCL also acts as a lever to develop the skills of heritage practitioners on “community-based, or people-centred, approaches to conservation, whereby local communities play the central role in heritage conservation” (Ishizawa, Inaba & Yoshida 2017, p. 156). The themes of the workshops are diverse and encompass sacred landscapes, agricultural landscapes and mixed natural and cultural World Heritage, among others. The course places high value and emphasis on attracting Indigenous and customary peoples and knowledges to participate in sharing multiple worldviews.

■ 2. Significance of Indigenous methodologies to natural and cultural values

Indigenous and customary knowledges over conserved territories and areas are some of the world’s oldest knowledge systems (Borrini-Feyerabend et al. 2012). Therefore, we use Indigenous methodologies to reflect on the learning process of participating in the CBWNCL.

²<https://www.cbd.int/sp/targets/rationale/target-18/>

Indigenous methodologies are grounded in an emic perspective of storytelling and make central Indigenous and customary worldviews. Principles of Indigenous methodologies include the need for Indigenous voices to be central, to retain an integrity to Indigenous political struggles and work towards emancipation of knowledges (Rigney 1999).

Indigenous methodologies are either strategic, which are aimed at decolonising Western structures of oppression, or convergent, which work towards knowledge co-productions and valuing Indigenous and customary experiences as equal to other knowledge forms (Ray 2012). Underpinning Indigenous methodologies are traditional knowledges, which the CBD interpret as the “knowledge, innovations and practices of indigenous and local communities embodying traditional lifestyles relevant for the conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity” (CBD 2018).

Traditional knowledges are core to convergent Indigenous methodologies and allow us to highlight Indigenous and customary peoples’ strengths and basis of claims and rights to conservation management and governance participation. Governance is particularly important for peoples as it is the participatory mechanism for decision-making, the means to understand how power is exercised and the rights to fairness, equity and transparency within accountable structures and institutions (Graham, Amos & Plumtre 2003). Majid (1996) reflects that conservation theory and practice, such as governance, is still premised upon secular, Western foundations usually in the hands of non-Indigenous academics. Thus, Indigenous and customary peoples are still the “known” and never the “knowers” (Moreton-Robinson 2004, p. 75). Indigenous methodologies, informed by traditional knowledges, instead allow Indigenous and customary peoples to be core to research and foreground new conservation foundations through valuing and reclaiming Indigenous epistemologies (Swadener & Mutua 2008).

Through engaging more Indigenous and customary practitioners in governance and capacity building, the World Heritage system would be able to address past failures in recognising and valuing Indigenous and customary peoples and traditional knowledges in nominations and management regimes (Logan 2013). Natural and cultural values,

then, can take on additional and deeper significance when Indigenous methodologies are applied to World Heritage nominations, governance and management to produce convergent approaches for inclusion. Finally, Indigenous methodologies of incorporating traditional knowledges reflect the lived experience of a people-centred approach to conservation, where endemic processes are “internal, place-bound and culturally-specific” (Mustonen 2017, p. 6) and translate into conservation practice.

■ 3. Inclusion of Indigenous and customary governance, language and stewardship knowledges

In light of the broad-based definition of traditional knowledges, we chose to focus on three areas of Indigenous and customary practices – governance, language and stewardship - that may contribute further to strengthening nature-culture linkages in World Heritage Sites of the Asia-Pacific region. The fieldtrip component of the CBWNCL to the Kii Mountains Range revealed that these practices are shared globally between Indigenous and customary peoples, although have diverse expressions, such as the difference between sacredness within formal religions of Japan and sacredness within localised Indigenous connections to territories through ancestral creators and beings.

Indigenous and customary governance is not of the boardroom with random members and interests (tebrakunna country, Lee & Tran 2016), but rather a family-based collective of Elders and knowledge-holders who share connections to territories through kinship, identity and politics (Natcher et al 2005; Sutton 2003). The Kii Mountains reflected customary governance where authority resides with spiritual Elders who look to local processes of inclusion to manage local territories and sacred sites. Furthermore, the Kii Mountains Range World Heritage property’s connections between sacred sites are articulated through the people-centred and localised management of shrines, such as Shugendo temples, and natural elements, such as the Nachi waterfall, which represent examples of integration of natural and cultural values that are the basis of its Outstanding Universal Value.

Language is a vital component of traditional knowledges (Wilder et al. 2016) and loss of local languages has often been correlated with loss of biodiversity (Loh & Harmon 2014). Therefore,

continuous use of traditional languages can support the safeguarding of the natural and cultural values for World Heritage Sites where Indigenous and customary interests are significant. Co-production of knowledges that incorporate local languages are a potent symbol of the inclusion and legitimacy of Indigenous and customary knowledges (Gapps & Smith 2015; Smith 2000). For Japan, the sacred is expressed as 'kami', where stories of creator beings have influenced the development of the Japanese language (Ohnuki-Tierney 1991). In the Kii Mountains, various chants and rituals performed by the spiritual Elders imparted local knowledges through local languages.

During presentations within the CBWNCL, participants often drew on their own local languages to reflect on learning experiences and present case studies of their own home territories. Localised traditional knowledges have many concepts that cannot often be translated and must retain local language use, such that for the Anishinaabe of Ontario, Canada, where *baamaadziwin* is a life practice of connecting nature and culture to an ethic of "living in good and respectful ways" (Holtgren, Ogren & Whyte, 2015, p. 55). Therefore, language assists in promoting and interpreting the specific values of the Outstanding Universal Value.

Traditional knowledges incorporate, among other things, non-human agency and spiritual governance into stewardship and conservation of territories (Verschuuren 2017). The holistic nature of traditional and customary conservation practices give rise to a multitude of nature-culture linkages that are not well understood within management practices (Johnson & Murton 2007). Traditional knowledges translate into stewardship practices as they embody a "web of relationships within a specific ecological context" (Battiste 2007, p. 117). For example, forests have been conserved surrounding the Koyasan Buddhist Temple, Kii Mountains Range, due to strict religious taboos on entry and use of the resources (Monotaka 2006). Further afield, taboos are used to conserve sacred groves across Asia, Europe, South America and Africa, while species-specific taboos have aided in the protection of threatened plants and animals (Colding & Folke 1997). Berke, Colding and Folke (2000, p. 1260) suggest that resilience to change and adaptation to variable environments comprise much of the traditional knowledges that govern stewardship practices and is a "consequence of historical experience with

disturbance and ecological surprise". Therefore, Indigenous and customary stewardship is based upon the generational connections and knowledges of experiencing, living and connecting with people-centred knowledges.

■ 4. Reflections of practicing and understanding nature-culture linkages

One of the key contributions of the CBWNCL for participants' understanding was demonstrating the tensions in recognising what constitutes nature or culture depending on the viewpoint. The presence of Indigenous peoples as participants revealed that while Western knowledges have progressed nature conservation there has been occasions where cultural traditions and values, which contribute to the maintenance of natural values of a World Heritage Site, have been ignored. One example is the World Heritage Committee's 2011 acceptance of a natural value nomination over Lake Borgoria, Kenya, without consent or consultation from the Endorois peoples (Disko, Tugendhat & Garcia-Alix 2014). While there are synergies between nature and culture sectors of heritage conservation, it is also important to understand that there is also antagonism between these conservation trends.

As was observed in the Kii Mountains, the shared values of language, governance and stewardship for the conservation of nature and culture were widely represented within the framework of various spiritual practices. This is highly appropriate for a World Heritage Site listed for cultural Outstanding Universal Value. At the same time, if the pendulum swings too far, so that the Outstanding Universal Value is viewed only through a natural lens, then the cultural contributions towards conservation can be obscured or devalued, such as the case for Mikisew Cree First Nation peoples and Wood Buffalo National Park World Heritage Site, Canada, and the lack of cultural recognition towards its values (Mikisew Cree First Nation 2017). The focus on 'ecosystems' as the dominant mode for conservation of natural Outstanding Universal Value can become fractured and reduced to its components of 'functional units' (Gorshkov, 1995; Gorshkov, Gorshkov & Makarieva, 2000), rather than community-based relationships of people, place and environment that, for Mikisew Cree and Endorois peoples, removes a cultural complexity and localised meaning.

Another area of tension is found within the concept of sacred. When a sacred landscape is reduced to its parts as a matter of accounting, labelling or sorting, sacredness is often then applied only to individual animals or plants or discrete geographic locations. Such an approach can lead to transformation of landscapes that favour one sacred species or place over another, where these efforts can distort the original aim of community-based conservation, such as the problems inherent in monoculture forests that predetermined the development of European forestry science practices (Domashov 2010; Lowood 1991). For example, Guichard-Anguis (2011) notes the far-reaching effects and changes to biodiversity and customary forestry management practices of the Kii Mountains with the introduction of modern technologies, such as the chainsaw. However, the World Heritage designation has gone some way to reform Kii Mountain practices (Guichard-Anguis 2011) and curtail the processes of degradation of natural values in favour of recognising the cultural contributions inherent within a cultural landscape. The problem of massively transformed landscapes, such as European forestry monocultures, is not simply to exclude them from conservation where they are devalued for not being pristine or aesthetic or sacred, but in shifting perceptions so that we recognise their contributions as part of a changing nature that has revolved around human interactions, whether favourable or not (Gorshkov, Gorshkov & Makarieva 2000). Therein lies the key to inclusion of traditional knowledges – the linkages between nature and culture depend on whose points of view and perceptions as to what is significant, sacred and worth conserving.

■ 5. Recommendations

Indigenous methodologies underpin the articulation of Indigenous and customary peoples' examination of the CBWNCL's efforts to understand sacredness and natural and cultural values of the Kii Mountains World Heritage Cultural Landscape. However, while traditional knowledges have contributed towards maintenance of Outstanding Universal Value of World Heritage Sites, these knowledges are poorly integrated into the governance, management and promotion of those sites. The 41st session of the World Heritage Convention in 2017 noted that for integrated approaches "their systematic examination...is only beginning to emerge", although universities can be "valuable partners in

both research and capacity building efforts" and highlighted University of Tsukuba's programme of workshops (UNESCO 2017, pp. 22-23). The creation of Cultural Landscape categories, mixed natural and cultural property listing and trends towards recognising nature and culture linkages, together with the Policy for sustainable development (UNESCO 2015), are incrementally improving the conditions for engagement and participation by Indigenous and customary peoples. Therefore, we conclude that the CBWNCL is a vital conduit for peoples to generate research towards World Heritage Convention aims of understanding Indigenous and customary governance, stewardship and retention of languages for better management of sites. We also recommend that the CBWNCL programme gain support from the World Heritage Convention to expand the programme beyond its four-year remit and continue to strengthen the outputs and contributions to Asia-Pacific conservation.

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