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World Heritage cities and community engagement: Surveying past, present and future practices

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ABSTRACT

Community engagement is today a goal of heritage management. Participatory practices are generally advocated for matters of authenticity and ethics, but also for the economic, environmental, cultural and social, in short, sustainable development of local communities. However, criticisms and challenges arise due to the diversity of practices, influenced by issues related to specific heritage properties, communities and management models.

International organisations and institutions are increasingly integrating topics of community engagement and participation of diverse ranges of stakeholders in their policies, charters and recommendations. The amount of academic and professional publications is growing worldwide, presenting specific case studies and local realities from different world regions.

All those studies provide valuable data, but little attempts have been made to compare them, disabling local governments and heritage professionals to learn from best practices and collaborate worldwide, as well as, models and trends to be identified. In this research, together with OWHC, we seek to reveal how local governments managing World Heritage cities today, engage the local communities in the management of World Heritage properties.

The participants of OWHC 14th World Congress on “Heritage & Communities: tools to engage with local communities” were invited to contribute to this research, by filling in a pre-congress online survey, available at the congress website, with questions on past, present and future practices in their cities. Participants were asked on how stakeholders generally participate in the management of heritage properties, which role they have and at which stage of the process they are involved. These data, supported by examples of local projects and policies, have then been cross-analysed to reveal global and regional trends, common issues, perceptions and best practices.

This research will give an overview of how local governments managing World Heritage cities engage with local communities in the management of World Heritage properties worldwide. Research results can inform recommendations for the implementation of participatory practices, facilitate future work, both global and local, both academic- and practitioner-led, to further develop, test and evaluate models for community engagement in heritage management, and World Heritage in particular.