CULTURAL HERITAGE MANAGEMENT IN MYANMAR:
A GATEWAY TO SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

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Cultural Heritage Management in Myanmar
A Gateway to Sustainable Development

By Stefano Facchinetti[1]

Abstract

Myanmar is currently at an historical, yet fragile transitional stage. Since a new government, headed by previous military leader Thein Sein, was formed in 2011, the country has indeed embarked in a sincerely welcomed process of political opening-up to the external world, and has positively resumed its dialogue with the international community. This led to the suspension of most international sanctions towards Myanmar, which, together with some timid reforms, are at the base of the first significant achievements in the field of economic growth and socio-political development. These reforms promise to transform the country into an economically prosperous, democratic state with greater civic participation, and unleash its great economic potential. To keep the momentum, all resources are now being used to support the country's development process.

But Myanmar has a further asset that nobody has properly valued nor utilised yet: its cultural heritage. Cultural heritage has indeed been recognised as an increasingly important aspect in a country's economy and society, because of its role encompassing all levels and aspects of the social life, and the economic benefits deriving from its management. Following a three-dimension approach, this paper will analyse how Myanmar's cultural heritage properties and their effective management could represent a useful resource towards the achievement of the country's development goals in the areas of economic growth, social and political unity, and environmental conservation and sustainability. The analysis will also consider the importance of the international engagement in the field of heritage conservation and promotion, and the potential benefits of a EU's direct involvement in cultural promotion and preservation projects in the country.

This paper expresses the views of the author and not the views of the European Institute for Asian Studies.

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List of abbreviations and acronyms

ADB   Asia Development Bank

BCE   Before Christ Era

CE   Christ Era

EU   European Union

GDP   Gross Domestic Product

ICCROM   International Centre for the Study of Preservation and Restoration of Cultural Property

MDGs   Millennium Development Goals

UN   United Nations

UNDP   United Nations Development Programme

UNESCO   United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

Introduction

Myanmar (previously known as Burma) is one of the least developed countries and one of the poorest economies in Southeast Asia, with an estimated yearly GDP per capita of USD 868, and a rank of 149 out of 187 countries in the Human Development Index of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).[2] Since a new government headed by former military leader Thein Sein was formed in 2011, the country has undertaken a process of political opening up to the external world and experienced some timid socio-economic reforms. Although for the moment it remains plagued by ethnic conflicts, corruption and religious tensions, Myanmar seems to have taken the first steps in the right direction, with the transition from military rule to a semi-civilian democracy, and embarking on a path of positive economic reforms to unlock the country's potential.

Although this potential is yet far from being materialised, in recent years the Asian Development Bank (ADB) has observed an upward trend in Myanmar's GDP: growth in GDP measured indeed about 5.5 per cent in 2012, 6.3 per cent in 2013 and is projected at 6.5 per cent in 2014.[3] This positive trend was possible thanks to the suspension of most international economic sanctions and rolling reform process in some key sectors of the society, principally in the financial sector. An overall improvement in the political situation, encompassing a more relaxed media censorship, release of political detainees, and reached ceasefire agreements in a number of conflict areas, also contributed to this success.

Myanmar is currently at an historical, yet fragile transitional stage in its development process. Still, should the path of reform initiated by President Thein Sein proceed smoothly, the country has the potential to become a land of opportunity for both local and international stakeholders. Myanmar is indeed considered a resource rich country with an enormous unexploited wealth in oil, gas, rare metals and timber.[4] With a surface of 676,578 square km. and a population of 59.1 million, it is also one of the largest and most populated countries in Southeast Asia, and its 2,800 km. coastline provides a key access to major sea-lanes and deep-sea ports in the Indian Ocean.[5] This makes it a potential "intra-Asia gateway" in terms of trade and development, also thanks to its strategic location between two economic giants: China and India.

But Myanmar has another economic asset that nobody has properly valued nor exploited yet: its cultural heritage. Cultural heritage is an increasingly critical element in the economy and society of developing countries, because of its main role encompassing all levels and aspects of social life. The promotion of cultural heritage could therefore act not only as stimulus to encourage local cultural expressions contributing to the growth of the local cultural sector and culture-related economic activities, but can also target other domains of development, as improving social cohesion and inclusion, minority rights, education, and environmental protection.

So far, despite a richness and variety in cultural heritage properties comparable to other more notable regional neighbours – Thailand and Cambodia –, most archaeological sites in

[2] Prachi, P. (2014, 30 June). Myanmar: Revival of the Hermit Kingdom. *The Diplomat*. Retrieved from http://thediplomat.com/2014/06/myanmar-revival-of-the-lost-kingdom/; and United Nations Development Program (UNDP). (2013). *Human Development Report 2013 for Myanmar*. Retrieved from http://hdr.undp.org/en/countries/profiles/MMR.

[3] Asia Development Bank (ADB). (2012) *Asian Development Outlook 2001: Update*.

[4] Megyeri, A.A. (2014). "The Final Frontier: The EU's Development Policy in Myanmar", *EIAS Briefing Paper*, European Institute for Asian Studies.

[5] United Nations Scientific, Cultural and Educational Organization (UNESCO). (2013). *UNESCO Country Programming Document (UCPD) for Myanmar 2013-2015*. Bangkok: UNESCO Asia and Pacific Regional Bureau for Education.

Myanmar have been neglected or selectively politicised to foster the legitimisation of the military regime, and to serve its political ambitions.[6] Nevertheless, following the renewed engagement with the international community and the United Nations (UN), in early 2013, a new National Cultural Central Committee was appointed in Myanmar under auspices of the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), which led Thein's administration to eventually ratify the 1970 Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property and the 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage. Furthermore, consultations regarding the ratification of the 2005 Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions are currently on-going, showcasing Myanmar's positive momentum in preserving and promoting its cultural heritage. The admission, in June 2014, of the Pyu's Ancient Cities to the UNESCO World Heritage List as Myanmar's first ever registered site was globally received as a strong signal rewarding the country for its efforts in the area of cultural heritage safeguard, and as a pledge by the UN agency to support the country in its development process towards an open, democratic and multicultural state.

This briefing paper aims to help maintain this positive momentum, drawing attention to Myanmar's cultural heritage, and emphasising the existing connection between an effective preservation and management of the cultural attributes, and three development goals of particular importance for Myanmar: economic development, socio-political development, and environmental development. Following this short introduction, the first part of this paper will identify a definition of cultural heritage, according primarily to the UNESCO conventions and international scholars, to set the theoretical framework. For the sake of this brief, only the so-called tangible cultural heritage will be taken into account. A second part will present the cultural properties of Myanmar and analyse the state's cultural policies and the process of politicization some of these properties have undergone. A third part will examine how cultural heritage management could serve as a driver for achieving a sustainable and inclusive economic, socio-political, and environmental development. Finally, the fourth and last part will illustrate the international projects safeguarding cultural heritage that have been implemented in recent years in Myanmar, in collaboration between some European countries and UNESCO, opening the possibility for future involvements of the European Union (EU) in this field.

1. A theoretical framework: definition and importance of cultural heritage

Attributing an unequivocal definition to the expression "cultural heritage" has long been a hard task. The concept has indeed largely broadened since the adoption of the 1964 Venice Charter for the Conservation and Restoration of Monuments and Sites, where it was first described as "the set of historical monuments, groups of buildings, sites and towns around the world" that are found evidence of a particular civilization, development or historic event, relevant for the unity of human values, and therefore worthy to be preserved for future generations.[7]

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[6] Philp, J. (2010). The political appropriation of Burma's cultural heritage and its implications for human rights. In M. Langfield, W. Logan and M.N. Craith (Eds.), *Cultural Diversity, Heritage and Human Rights* (pp. 83-100). Oxon: Routledge.

[7] *International Charter for the Conservation and Restoration of Monuments and Sites*, adopted by the General Conference of UNESCO on 31 May 1964.

Today, cultural heritage is more commonly defined as the set of "cultural assets inherited from the past in all forms and aspects, being them tangible, intangible, or digital (either born digital or digitized)".[8] This general definition incorporates monuments, buildings, sites, landscapes, as well as collections, conserved and managed by public or private institutes, museums, libraries, and archives, but also practices, knowledge and other expressions of human creativity, making hence no distinction between the so-called "tangible" and "intangible" cultural heritage.

The former category of "tangible" cultural heritage finds its primary source of expression in the 1972 Convention on the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritages, which includes under the term the following attributes:

  i.   *Monuments*: architectural works, monumental sculptures and paintings, elements or structures of an archaeological nature, inscriptions, cave dwellings and combinations of features, which are of outstanding universal value from the point of view of history, art or science;

  ii. *Groups of buildings*: groups of separate or connected buildings which, because of their architecture, their homogeneity or their place in the landscape, are of outstanding universal value from the point of view of history, art or science; and

  iii. *Sites*: works of man, or combined works of nature and man, as well as areas including archaeological sites, which are considered of outstanding universal value from the historical, aesthetic, ethnological or anthropological point of view.[9]

The "intangible" cultural heritage is instead most commonly defined as in the 2003 Convention on the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage, embracing "the practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, skills [even cuisine] – as well as instruments, objects, artefacts, and cultural spaces associated therewith – that communities, groups and in some cases individuals, recognize as part of their cultural heritage".[10] Intangible cultural heritage is a form of heritage in constant evolution and comprises also realities that, until recently, were not properly valued in the eyes of the international community.

Although tangible and intangible cultural heritage may be very different, they represent two sides of the same coin: both are indeed directly involved in the construction of a nation's or a community's identity, as expressions of a common history, cultural background, value system and collective imagination and memory. Monuments, buildings and artefacts are the tangible proof of – and the catalyst for – underlying, intangible beliefs, traditions and values. There exists therefore a "symbiotic relationship" between the tangible and intangible heritage, and the latter should be seen as a "larger framework within which tangible heritage takes on shape and significance".[11]

Cultural heritage, in both its tangible and intangible forms, embodies therefore all the aspects of a community's past and present that are considered meaningful for defining its identity, and valuable to pass on to future generations. It is also considered important for a great number of reasons, notably for its role as an engine that drives the process of community-

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[8] *Conclusions on cultural heritage as a strategic resource for a sustainable Europe,* released by the Council of the EU, Education, Youth, Culture and Sport Council on 20 May 2014.

[9] *Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage*, adopted by the General Conference of UNESCO on 16 November 1972.

[10] *Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage*, adopted by the General Conference of UNESCO on 17 October 2003.

[11] Bouchenaki, M. (2003). *The Interdependency of the Tangible and Intangible Cultural Heritage*. Paper presented at the 14th ICOMOS General Assembly and Scientific Symposium in Victoria Falls. Retrieved from http://openarchive.icomos.org/468/1/2_-_Allocution_Bouchenaki.pdf.

and nation-building, and for its effects embracing all levels and aspects of the social life, and reconciling the needs of the citizens, the economy, the community and the environment.[12]

Although its importance and benefits for the local territory and communities have been widely acknowledged, in most cases cultural heritage conservation is unfortunately not regarded as a priority by state governments in the development process, unless its relations with social and economic activities and international exchanges are made clear.[13] This is exactly the case in Myanmar where the government, despite having one of the richest cultural heritage settings in the region, has mismanaged or neglected it, and continues to underestimate its potential for economic and socio-political development.

While taking into full consideration the undisputable tangible-intangible dichotomy of cultural heritage, and while acknowledging the value and potentials of the intangible cultural heritage, for the sake of this briefing paper only the tangible, "built" cultural heritage of Myanmar will be taken into account, as the first to be considered "bankable", and internationally recognised for its value as a driver of development.

2. The cultural heritage of Myanmar

Myanmar's tangible cultural heritage is one of the richest and most diverse in the Southeast Asian region, and is comparable to that of other more notable regional neighbours – namely Cambodia and Thailand. Still, the conditions of severe international isolation and harsh domestic repression affecting the country since the 1962 military takeover – particularly after the 1990s – have led to a vacuum in the field of heritage conservation and most archaeological sites lie idle in ruinous conditions due to protracted periods of neglect.

Domestically, the legal framework enacted for the safeguarding of heritage has been insufficient and, still, largely disregarded. Before the coup and during the regime, only two major laws were established by the government for cultural heritage protection: the 1957 "Antiquities Act", which stated conditions for excavation claims, land use, as well as for movement inside and outside the country, restoration, and management of antiquities, and obligations to report discoveries of archaeological objects; and the 1998 "Protection and Preservation of Cultural Heritage Regions Law" that specifically addressed the safeguard of cultural heritage – defined as ancient monuments or sites that are required to be preserved in virtue of their historical, cultural, artistic or anthropological importance – which identified objects and competent authorities for cultural heritage protection. These two laws, which still constitute the existing legal framework for safeguarding cultural heritage in the country, have however been mostly disregarded in the past, or selectively implemented to bolster the legitimisation of the military junta and serve its political ambitions.[14] This dual approach was possible as the 1998 law, while based on the rationale of preserving the cultural heritage, actually restricted the room of manoeuvre for independent restoration and renovation,

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[12] *Why Cultural Heritage Matters for Europe*, Europa Nostra Policy Document, adopted by the Council during the Europa Nostra Annual Congress on 3 June 2009.
[13] Pugliese, T., and Da Sacco, M.G. (2007). Cultural Heritage as a socio-economic development factor. *Med-Pact Project*. Retrieved from http://www.med-pact.com/Download/Archimedes/11%20Introduction%20Paper%20Cultural%20Heritage%20and%20Ec%20Dvlpmt.pdf
[14] Philp, The political appropriation of Burma's cultural heritage and its implications for human rights, p.83

precluding either individuals or organisations other than the government from undertaking reconstruction works of pagodas, monasteries, and temples.[15]

Examples of this can be retraced looking at the management of archaeological sites that testify cultures of ethnic and religious minorities versus those considered useful to foster the Burmese Buddhist national identity. In past years, the junta has indeed appropriated the beliefs, rituals, traditions and cultural heritage of the Burmese Buddhist community to build a feeling of "nation state" and suggest a sense of solidarity between the majority of Burmese population and the military government, in order to legitimate its political power and authority.[16] This is particularly true in the case of cultural heritage sites in the Bago district (Hanthawaddy) in the Mon State that have been renovated and promoted by the government in the 1990s to strengthen a version of Myanmar's history where the Burmese Buddhist ethnic group is the dominant. On the other hand, while prompting the regime to selectively preserve those sites that fostered useful messages for its political ambitions, such symbolic importance of cultural heritage also led to the deliberate destruction or neglect of other properties that opposed those ambitions.[17] This is the case, in comparison, of heritage sites that testified a minority's cultural features or the country's cultural variety, as the Oktha-myo archaeological site. This principality of the Mon ethnic minority – ancient Myanmar inhabitants that for long resisted the central kingdom – was purposefully left to deteriorate to reject the Mon's political and artistic contribution to the Burmese history and culture.

Besides, it must also be noted that when public initiatives for cultural heritage protection or restoration were adopted, these were based generally on an economic-cultural policy, leaning more towards a partial, artificial reconstruction, rather than towards a proper conservation and methodical maintenance.[18] Hence, most restoration and renovation works undertaken did not conform to the guidelines and criteria necessary for designation as a World Heritage site, and often led to the alteration of the original artefacts – as in the case of the most famous Bagan archaeological site.

Moving forward to the international legal framework for cultural heritage safeguard, Myanmar had until recently ratified only two international conventions: the Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict (also known as The Hague Convention) and Protocols to the Convention in 1956 and the Convention on the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage of 1972 in 1994. Eventually, the National Cultural Central Committee, appointed in January 2013 under the auspices of UNESCO, has led the Thein administration to ratify also the 1970 Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property in September 2013, and the 2003 Convention on the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage in May 2014. Consultations concerning the ratification of the 2005 Convention on the Protection and Promotion of Diversity of Cultural Expressions are currently ongoing, but appear troublesome considering the difficult relations between the central government and the numerous minority ethnic groups occupying Myanmar's mountainous peripheries.

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[15] Houtman, G. (1999). *Mental Culture in Burmese Crisis Politics. Aung San Suu Kyi and the National League for Democracy*. Tokyo: Institute for the Study of Languages and Cultures of Asia and Africa, Tokyo University of Foreign Studies. Cited in Philp, The political appropriation of Burma's cultural heritage and its implications for human rights.

[16] Philp, The political appropriation of Burma's cultural heritage and its implications for human rights, p.84-86

[17] Gamboni, D. (2001). "World Heritage: Shield or Target?". *The Getty Conservation Institute Newsletter*. Retrieved from http://www.getty.edu/conservation/institute

[18] Messeri, B. (2007). *Myanmar: A Comparison Between Past and Present. What is Happening in the field of architectural heritage conservation: The techniques used, the principles of preservation applied and the relative plans for heritage management*. Paper presented on 1-6 October 20s07 at the XXI International Committee for Documentation of Cultural Heritage (CIPA) Symposium in Athens, Greece. Retrieved from http://cipa.icomos.org/fileadmin/template/doc/ATHENS/FP098.pdf

Such recent, long-awaited ratifications of the 1970 and 2003 international conventions and improved domestic measures in the field of safeguarding cultural heritage, accomplished after the 2011 opening-up and the appeasement with the international community, have fostered general optimism about Myanmar's cultural heritage situation. While several concerns remain about a possible mis-maintenance and so-called "Disney-style" objectification of sites, recent efforts made in cooperation with UNESCO and some European and Asian countries to restore the archaeological sites, and the design of conservation and management plans for the coming biennium, are among the reasons that led the UNESCO World Heritage Committee to endorse the appointment in June 2014 of the "Pyu Ancient Cities" as Myanmar's first World Heritage cultural property.[19] Nominated for their extraordinary historical importance, the three old city-states of Halin, Beikthano-Myo and Sri Ksetra, situated in the Dry Zone of the middle Irrawaddy and Chindwin river basins, are tangible testimony of the so-called "Pyu Millennium" (between ca. 200 BCE and 900 CE), and of the Tibeto-Burman-speaking Pyu minority – among the earliest inhabitants of Myanmar.[20] Protected by moats and walls, these urban settlements were part of an historical trade route between China and India, and have conserved remains of some monumental Buddhist *stupas* (reliquaries), ceremonial structures, palace-citadels, burial grounds, water management features and early industrial production sites.

Following an internationally-partnered restoration project (see chapter 4), the admission of the Pyu Ancient Cities to the UNESCO World Heritage List has been greeted worldwide, rewarding Myanmar for its efforts in the field of cultural heritage. In addition, this was also considered a pledge by the UN, to support Myanmar's development process towards an open, democratic and multi-cultural state, where heritage assets (both natural and cultural) are safeguarded and managed in line with international standards. More recently, UNESCO has offered its assistance to Myanmar to conduct an inventory and develop conservation guidelines for the protection of other cultural heritage sites, which are still on the Tentative List for World Heritage status.[21] Currently, Myanmar's cultural proprieties on Tentative List include:

· The Ancient Cities of Upper Myanmar: Innwa, Amarapura, Sagaing, Mingun, Mandalay;
· Badah-lin and the Associated Caves;
· The Inle Lake;
· The Mon Cities: Bago, Hanthawaddy;
· The Myauk-U Archaeological Area and Monuments;
· The Wooden Monasteries of Konbaung Period: Ohn Don, Sala, Pakhangyi, Pakhannge, Legaing, Sagu, Shwe-Kyaung; and
· The Bagan Archaeological Area and Monuments.

Especially the latter is emerging in last years as the primary target for national development and international cooperation projects in the field of cultural conservation, it being the richest and the most internationally renowned of Myanmar. The Bagan Archaeological Area is indeed a cultural heritage site of immense importance, covering a vast plain of 80 square km. and containing more than 2,500 monuments built between the 10th and the 14th century. Its

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[19] Eleven. (2014, July 2). *Safeguarding Myanmar's World Heritage Sites*. Retrieved from http://www.elevenmyanmar.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=6633:safeguarding-myanmar-s-world-heritage-sites&catid=34:lifestyle&Itemid=357.

[20] UNESCO World Heritage Centre. (2014). *Pyu Ancient Cities*. Retrieved from http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/1444, and; UNESCO World Heritage Centre (2014). *Myanmar's first site inscribed to World Heritage List*. Retrieved from http://whc.unesco.org/en/news/1158/.

[21] The Irrawaddy. (2014, June 27). UNESCO to Offer Assistance With Bagan Conservation Work. *The Irrawaddy*. Retrieved from http://www.irrawaddy.org/burma/unesco-offer-assistance-bagan-conservation-work.html.

monuments include several temples devoted to the Theravada Buddhism, monastic complexes, enormous stucco-covered brickwork constructions and timber structures. As Bagan was the capital of the first unified Burmese Kingdom, the mural paintings and antique stone inscriptions on the inside of the buildings provide a unique and irreplaceable testimony of Myanmar's intellectual, social and political history.[22] While the cultural and historical importance of this site has been unanimously recognised, Bagan lingers on the Tentative List for World Heritage status since 1996, due to the lack of a comprehensive management plan for the site and reconstruction works not conforming to UNESCO's criteria.[23] Given the localisation of Bagan in a seismic area, monuments have been recurrently damaged by earthquakes, and needed several repairs and restorations. In the 1980s, Myanmar's Department of Archaeology, in collaboration with UNESCO and the UNDP, designed a plan for the conservation of some buildings and mural paintings, but conflicts and tensions between the military junta and the international organizations prohibited the further continuation. Henceforth, reconstruction works implemented by the government involved practices not aligned with UNESCO's criteria and often entailed a questionable beautification process — with materials and designs different from originals, and missing parts artificially replaced with newly made ones — rather than actual restoration. This has led international experts to speak of falsification and "Disney-fication" of the historic-religious site.[24]

Since 2012, however, as part of the international community's reengagement with Myanmar's government, UNESCO has resumed the activities in Bagan, to effectively implement a site management plan and help apply related measures and regulations for conservation to avoid further misguided reconstructions in the future. Thein's administration has indeed placed great importance on the revitalisation and promotion of Bagan, to become the principal destination for cultural tourism in the country. But this renewed emphasis has casted also concerns about the further deterioration of the site possibly caused by the construction of amenities – including restaurants, offices and hotels – in the surroundings. Critiques were already expressed in past years – after the regime proceeded with the construction of a 60-metre high viewing tower and golf club nearby the site. At that time, UNESCO's Advisor for Culture in Asia and the Pacific Richard Engelhardt expressed his wish that no infrastructures would be built in the protected area, due to the already precarious conditions of monuments, arguing that commodifying the site for mass tourism in this way was "completely the wrong strategy [and would have only led] to the simple deterioration of the heritage".[25]

The connection between cultural heritage and tourism is certainly clear and Bagan definitely has a key role to play in the cultural and economic life of the country and in its development path. Good maintenance and management plans together with international guidance and standards are nonetheless needed to avoid the uncontrolled economic exploitation of the site and prevent it from degradation.

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[22] Unakul, M., and Rellensmann, C. (2013). *Capacity Building for Safeguarding Cultural Heritage in Myanmar.* Bangkok: UNESCO Asia and Pacific Regional Bureau for Education.
[23] Philp, The political appropriation of Burma's cultural heritage and its implications for human rights, p.91.
[24] Messeri. *Myanmar: A Comparison Between Past and Present. What is Happening in the field of architectural heritage conservation: The techniques used, the principles of preservation applied and the relative plans for heritage management*, p.2; and Bredy, B. (2013, May 15). The Ancient Burmese City of Bagan Struggles for International Recognition. *Time*. Retrieved from http://world.time.com/2013/05/15/bagan/.
[25] Richard Engelhardt, interview cited in Harding, A. (2005, June 4). Burma rebuilding risks Pagan jewel. *BBC News*. Retrieved from http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/asia-pacific/4606759.stm; and Richard Engelhardt, quoted in Asia West Pacific Network for Urban Conservation. (2002). *AWPNUC Newsletter 7*, No. 2, retrieved in Taylor, K. (2004). Cultural Heritage Management: A Possible Role for Charters and Principles in Asia. *International Journal of Heritage Studies*, 10(5), pp. 417–433.

3. Cultural heritage as a vector for sustainable development

In recent years, cultural heritage has been acknowledged as an increasingly important factor in a country's economy and society because of its major role encompassing all levels and aspects of social life, and the economic benefits deriving from its management. Conserving cultural heritage represents an extraordinarily effective way to preserve the link with a nation's history, culture and traditions – by safeguarding specific structures, sites and settings significant for a particular development or historic event. At the same time, it also targets cohesiveness among different social parties, tolerance, stability and ecological consciousness, and creates economic benefits and job opportunities in a number of sectors related to culture, tourism and the creative and service industries.

Given its function in poverty reduction and in strengthening social inclusion, great pressure has been exerted lately by governmental and non-governmental institutions, and by international cultural actors, to have culture – and cultural heritage as part of it – integrated among the key factors and future priorities in pursuing sustainable development at local, national and global levels. Despite the advocacy work, however, culture has not yet been inserted in the UN Post-2015 Development Agenda, but in multiple occasions in recent years was recognized by the UN as a successful driver and enabler for sustainable development. In 2010, for example, the UN resolution N.65/1 "Keeping the promise: United to achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)" first explicitly acknowledged the value of culture for development, and its contribution in accomplishing the MDGs.[26] The following year, in UN resolution N.66/208 "Culture and Development", cultural heritage was recognised as an important factor for social inclusion and poverty eradication, and its potential – as the services delivered around the site, improvement in building and restoration techniques, and recovery of natural and cultural areas – recognised as a vector for modernisation and innovations in economic and social life.[27] In 2012 the Outcome Document of the UN Conference on Sustainable Development Rio+20 "The future we want" also included a series of significant references to culture, affirming that the welfare of communities also depends on their cultural heritage and that appropriate conservation directly contributes to the economic, social and environmental sustainable development of societies.[28]

More recently the Declaration "Placing culture at the heart of sustainable development policies" adopted on May 2013 at the UNESCO Hangzhou International Congress, and reprised in the UN resolution N.68/223 "Culture and Sustainable Development", recognised culture as both driver and enabler for sustainable development, bearing evidence of the successful contribution made in furthering strategies and programmes aimed at inclusive and sustainable development.[29] In particular, the resolution emphasised the three-dimension support of culture – and of cultural heritage as part of it – to the realisation of national development objectives and internationally approved development goals, including the MDGs, concurring to stimulate inclusive *economic*, *social* and *environmental* development.

Following this three-dimension approach, the paragraph will now analyse in three sub-sections how Myanmar's cultural heritage assets and their effective management represent a

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[26] *United Nations resolution N.65/1 "Keeping the promise: United to achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)"*, adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations on 19 October 2010.
[27] *United Nations resolution N.66/208 "Culture and Development"*, adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations on 22 December 2011.
[28] *United Nations Outcome Document of the Conference on Sustainable Development Rio+20 "The future we want"*, released on 22 June 2012.
[29] *UNESCO Hangzhou Declaration: "Placing Culture at the Heart of Sustainable Development Policies"*. Adopted in Hangzhou, China, on 17 May 2013.

useful resource towards the achievement of the country's development goals in the fields of economic growth, social and political unity, and environmental conservation and sustainability.

a. Economic development

Tangible cultural heritage was the first to be recognised for its value as a driver for economic development as also the first cultural asset to be considered "bankable". Already in the 1970s, both UNDP and the World Bank started to justify investment in cultural heritage preservation on purely economic grounds, and by 1980 it had become commonplace to speak of a "heritage industry", especially in combination with the rising tourism industry. [30] Currently, the link between heritage management and economic benefits has been endorsed by a number of international studies, and cultural heritage is increasingly recognised as an important source of income and a generator of both employment opportunities and tourism flows.

Experts have suggested, indeed, that cultural heritage could represent a potential engine for a country's economic development igniting local economic activities in a number of sectors. More recently, conclusions of the EU Education, Youth, Culture and Sport Council meeting on cultural heritage as a strategic resource for a sustainable Europe, underscored the contribution of this resource to the achievement of the EU 2020 strategy goals including, amid others, a smart and sustainable inclusive economic growth.[31]

As stressed by Patricio Jeretic and Gian Giuseppe Simeone an effective heritage management and development projects would indeed represent a direct economic contribution to culture-related activities, in terms of promoting both cultural goods and services. It would furthermore generate an indirect economic impact, addressing in particular the transition from a subsistence economy with very low income towards an economic model with higher added value, supporting the development of service delivering sectors.[32] The direct economic impact of cultural heritage involves activities in which heritage enters as an essential component – as the management of archaeological sites and museums, the restoration and use of historical buildings, the use of traditional technology and know-how, decoration or crafts, and activities related to cultural tourism as the production of audio-visuals and publications. These activities promote the employment of local resources like artists and culture professionals, independent entrepreneurs, cultural associations, training facilities and natural resources and furthermore generate goods and services that are valued in economic terms.

Moreover, there are additional, albeit indirect, economic benefits in other sectors linked to the cultural heritage field, above all the service sector: technical services providers, administrative and financial services, cultural tourism-related services, transports, goods and services related to the accessibility of heritage sites and so forth. When a heritage site is properly restored and promoted, it becomes indeed a development pole for tourism, culture,

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[30] UNESCO. (2013). *Creative Economy Report 2013: Widening Local Development Pathaways*. New York and Paris: UNDP/UNESCO.

[31] *Conclusions on cultural heritage as a strategic resource for a sustainable Europe.*

[32] Jeretic, P., and Simeone, G.G. (2011). *Thematic Briefing Note on the External Cooperation Projects in the Field of Cultural Heritage: Heritage and Economic, Social and Human Development*. Briefing paper presented on 7-10 February at the conference "Cultural Heritage & Economic and Social Development", organized by the Directorate General of the European Commission for Development and Cooperation, and the École du Patrimoine Africaine in Porto Novo.

trade and entertainment activities, as well as for hotels, restaurants and other service supplying facilities. This not only helps the economic sector to grow, but also contributes to the development and improvement of the image of a city or region, which would eventually attract visitors and potential investors. Studies have also shown that one of the criteria considered by international companies when choosing the location of their operations abroad is the socio-cultural environment and quality of life, which – as mentioned in previously cited UN resolutions and conventions – depends on, among other factors, the level of conservation and promotion of the local cultural heritage.[33]

Cultural heritage also contributes as a driving force for economic development of peripheral or rural regions since management and restoration projects also impact displays of intangible cultural heritage such as traditional manifestations and cultural events. Especially festivals and other artistic events summoning the general public – taking place within cultural heritage sites – represent an important source of income for local businesses and positively impact economic activities in all sectors in the area. In rural or peripheral areas, where few economic resources are available, activities by the presence of participants at cultural events would give a boost to the local economy. In turn, this would generate job opportunities and income for marginal social categories and disadvantaged people – which also involves a socio-economic development and the lifting of the social fragmentation. The dynamics generated by heritage-related activities and events would be greatly beneficial for Myanmar, and particularly for the Upper Burma region where the Bagan archaeological site and the Pyu Ancient Cities are located, a traditionally rural and economically backward area among the country's poorest.

Similarly, cultural activities and heritage rehabilitation and management plans could also boost the renaissance of urban spaces. Monuments and museums, being the principal attractions for visitors, are increasingly acknowledged as an important source of income and contribute to a city's image. The adaptive re-use of historic monuments and buildings as public offices not only offers an excellent cost-benefit ratio, but also helps rejuvenate the image and economic base of older parts of the city creating both income and employment opportunities.[34] This would be the case, for instance, of the historic buildings of Yangon: this set of now-decaying British colonial-era administrative edifices is an outstanding example of Burma's former capital's history and architectural identity, embodying the transition from colonial Burma to independent Burma. And yet despite the undeniable historic value, many of these architectural sites remain without official recognition, and are nowadays abandoned or fall prey to a ruthless modernisation rush. If a well-balanced development and a sound management plan are put in place, Yangon's older districts could become terrific public spaces for dialogue and social inclusion. Moreover, with the support of culture-aware policies and international projects, they have the potential to turn into a great tourist destination. This would also represent a flashpoint for a sustainable urban revitalisation wave, increasing market and employment opportunities, as well as income generating activities.

In recent years, the demand for cultural destinations has become a prominent force in the global economy, and Myanmar's touristic sector has been on the rise since the country's political opening-up. With these premises, the design and implementation of effective safeguard and management plans for its cultural heritage properties would turn Myanmar into a world major destination for tourism. Such measures would also contribute to the

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[33] Jeretic, P. (2014). *Study on projects using cultural expressions as a lever for employment, human rights, democracy and other human development areas*. Brussels: European Commission Directorate General for Development and Cooperation.
[34] UNESCO, *Creative Economy Report 2013: Widening Local Development Pathaways*, p.45

inclusive and sustainable economic development of the country: by encouraging the use of local resources – artists and workers, financial resources, or the untapped wealth of natural resources – the country would attract not only more visitors but also new investors and businesses. Furthermore, successful projects trigger a virtuous circle, as through replication they stimulate the design of other culturally significant initiatives and income generating activities, creating momentum and better conditions for all economic sectors to develop.[35]

b. Socio-political development

Since its political opening-up, improvements made by Myanmar in the fields of democratisation and socio-political development, have earned the country wide international acclaim, and the new administration has shown a genuine intention to progress towards a state of pluralism, transparency and greater participation of civil society. Nonetheless, the country seems to have still a long way ahead before realising these ambitions, as ethnic conflicts endure and the trust building and reconciliation process among different communities remains difficult.

Myanmar is indeed an extremely diverse multicultural state officially comprising 135 subgroups gathered in eight major ethnicities, namely Kachin, Kaya, Kayin, Chin, Shan, Mon, Rakhine and Bamar. Tensions between the Bamar majority group, representing two thirds of the population and inhabiting the central part of the country, and other minorities, occupying the peripheral mountainous areas, have been on-going for many years now, and represent the main threat to the country's internal stability. Minorities suffered from protracted periods of harsh repression, extreme poverty and exploitation by the regime and, despite the recent political transition, are still subject to ethnic sectarian violence and discrimination policies. This makes for the fact that reciprocal mistrust, violence and discrimination are widespread, and a sense of community and belonging to the same nation is absent. Achieving reconciliation and harmony, promoting social inclusion, building a sense of community, and securing political stability, are hence the most urgent matters Myanmar needs to address to proceed with the country's socio-political development.

Cultural heritage, with its identity-promoting role and civilisation dimension, could serve as an asset towards the accomplishment of such vital goals in Myanmar's development process. This particular characteristic of cultural heritage is well described in the words of the Charter for the Conservation of Unprotected Heritage and Sites in India, adopted by the Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage, which states that "conserving the architectural heritage and sites ensures the survival of a country's sense of place and character in a globalizing environment", offering the community "the opportunity not only to conserve the past, but also to define the future".[36] If preserved and promoted, cultural heritage contributes indeed to strengthening the identity and sense of belonging to a group, and promotes diversity, intercultural and interfaith dialogue creating social cohesion through better understanding and respect between peoples.[37] The promotion of local cultures, traditions, identities, as well as differences and commonalities, through safeguarding cultural heritage,

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[35] Jeretic, *Study on projects using cultural expressions as a lever for employment, human rights, democracy and other human development areas*, p.26.

[36] *Charter for the Conservation of Unprotected Heritage and Sites in India*, adopted on 4 November 2004 by the Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage (INTACH). Retrieved from http://www.intach.org/about-charter.asp?links=about3.

[37] *Conclusions on cultural heritage as a strategic resource for a sustainable Europe.*

could act as a factor to enrich communities, fortify mutual understanding and trust, and contribute to a complete and balanced human and socio-political development.

It has been emphasised how, particularly in areas that have experienced violent ethnic conflict, such as Myanmar, the rehabilitation of cultural heritage should be promoted to enable affected communities to restore and redefine their identity, regain a sense of dignity and normalcy, and use the universal language of arts and architecture to heal the scars of wars.[38] Heritage is thus understood as common ground for mutual understanding, and a springboard from which to renew and reconstruct local and national identity. Cultural heritage sites act as a medium to enhance social integration and cohesion through the identification and promotion of a common history and shared cultural values among local communities. Sharing common values fosters the sense of belonging to a same group, and is a key element for integration, pride, unity and stability at local, regional and national levels.

A recently published report by Patricio Jeretic provides numerous examples of how projects in the field of cultural cooperation and cultural heritage management have acted as vectors to accomplish a series of socio-political objectives.[39] The projects mentioned in the report testify to several positive achievements, as improved human, citizens' and cultural rights; enhanced mechanisms of local governance; increased public engagement and influence on the democratic and nation-building processes; greater tolerance and mutual understanding; and improved individual and collective freedom. Many examples reported also reveal that the loss of cultural identity – depending on, among other causes, the deterioration of cultural heritage artefacts and monuments – is closely connected to the loss of social cohesion and harmony, as it generates disorientation, detachment from a common history and values, and eventually violence. Especially in the case of ethnic minorities, group representation and ultimate survival strongly depend on the safeguarding of their cultural identity, heritage, language and traditions, as they contribute to defining a role in society and building a sense of community. The conservation and promotion of all ethnicities' cultures and heritage must hence be an essential component of human rights policies, and a key question in terms of good governance, justice, respect for minorities and political stability.

In the context of political and/or social marginalisation of minorities, projects related to the conservation and promotion of heritage sites would raise awareness on issues such as human, cultural, and minorities' rights, discrimination and inter-ethnical violence. Cultural projects proved indeed to be very effective in encouraging mutual understanding, social cohesion and civic participation, as well as strengthening human, cultural and minorities' rights. In addition, they help reinforce the democratic process and the governance structures at both local and national levels. Bringing together experts, workers, apprentices and general audience from different ethnic communities and social groups to effectively restore and manage cultural heritage sites, helps to build confidence and promotes collaboration and teamwork, strengthening a sense of belonging to a same group through the identification of common traditions, values and objectives. Moreover, the inclusion of heritage studies in academic curricula can also be an effective way to encourage inter-cultural dialogue and approach sensitive issues as cultural understanding, respect, human and minorities' rights, good governance and democracy.

To paraphrase Christian Barillet, Thierry Joffroy and Isabelle Longuet, to safeguard its cultural heritage is for a country to work towards the recovery of a collective memory and a common

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[38] *UNESCO Hangzhou Declaration: "Placing Culture at the Heart of Sustainable Development Policies"*.
[39] Jeretic, *Study on projects using cultural expressions as a lever for employment, human rights, democracy and other human development areas*, p.30.

identity, and through this effort create social cohesion and harmony.[40] Preserving the cultural heritage means therefore to contribute to a better mutual understanding and to trust building amongst different communities present on a territory, each with their specific identity. This requires a recognition and respect of cultural differences by every ethnicity and the upholding of democratic, human, cultural and minorities' rights by the central government. This ultimately results in better social harmony, governance, and political stability – key elements in the implementation of a sustainable socio-political development policy. As Thein's government seeks to regain people's trust and support, the conservation and effective management of the country's heritage must be regarded as core elements in order to further proceed with the nation-building process and the creation of a pluralistic multicultural democracy. To respect and promote the multicultural aspects of cultural heritage would be an extremely meaningful signal and a powerful tool to reinforce the newly launched democratic attitude of the government. In turn this could increase popular support and enhance the stability of the country.

c. Environmental development

As seen already, the concept of sustainable development is generally understood as embracing three interrelated aspects: economic growth, social cohesion and inclusion, and environmental sustainability. As Myanmar's economic development progresses, environmental sustainability seems to have emerged as a core national interest. In light of the potential surge in economic investment and development foreseen by the recent economic and political reforms, it must be quintessential to regard the environment. Matters as environmental conservation, respect for biodiversity, and the responsible use of natural resources, seem indeed to have attracted the increasing attention of the country's population, also thanks to the on-going expansion of a free press service and access to information. Environmentalist movements have multiplied in Myanmar in recent years, challenging a number of development projects. President Thein also mentioned public opinion as a main factor behind his decision, in September 2011, to suspend the construction of the Myitsone Dam at the headwaters of the Ayeyarwady River.[41] Other initiatives, undertaken by public and nongovernmental organizations driven by a desire to protect the country's unique biodiversity and environmental resources have also led to, among other outcomes, the drafting of a new foreign investment law requiring environmental impact assessments for all major development projects, and the parliamentary proposal to establish higher environmental standards and an Ayeyarwady River Commission to ensure the conservation of the country's main water artery.

The issues of environmental preservation and the safeguarding of cultural heritage are directly related. Deterioration of the natural environment, due to pollution, unregulated construction, resource extraction and other destructive practices, has a direct detrimental impact also on cultural heritage sites and monuments, whereas the conservation and correct management of cultural resources result in a combined positive effect on the surrounding natural environment. The conservation of cultural heritage properties has indeed a beneficial influence also on the natural landscape hosting them, as effective management plans for heritage sites include a fundamental dimension of sustainable spatial planning that is designed in close relation to the surrounding natural environment, and includes essential

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[40] Barillet, C., Joffroy, T., and Longuet, I. (2006). *Cultural Heritage & Local Development: A Guide for African Local Governments*. Grenoble: CRATerre-ENSAG/Convention France-UNESCO.
[41] Clapp, P. (2013, March 8). Myanmar Rises to Challenge of Environmental Conservation. *Asia Society.* Retrieved from http://asiasociety.org/blog/asia/myanmar-rises-challenge-environmental-conservation.

regulations for land and resource. When talking about cultural heritage, potential environmental development refers therefore to sustainable spatial planning and management, not just of archaeological sites and architectural monuments, but also of the surrounding and relating eco-systems, natural resources and bio-diversity.

Moreover, sustainable and effective management plans for heritage sites would also take into account the traditional systems and practices of local communities – as part of the intangible cultural heritage linked with the tangible cultural landscapes – of interacting with that specific eco-system, including traditional approaches to environmental protection and natural resource management. These practices include, among others: protecting fragile local eco-systems and biological diversity; maintaining the complexity and stability of local eco-systems; the sustainable use of the bio-diversity, and support for local organic food production, reducing land degradation; and erosion prevention and the mitigation of the effects of climate change.[42]

Spatial planning and ecological assessment for cultural heritage conservation and management plans have significant impact in terms of sustainable environmental development also in urban contexts. Indeed, they often include the rehabilitation of historic buildings, venues, streets and river shores, as well as the construction of more and better maintained green areas and public parks in the city centres in proximity of cultural sites and museums, and the sanitation and cleaning-up of degraded urban spaces. This not only brings improvement in the appearance of city centres, but the enhanced building and maintenance techniques – following the assistance of international actors, and involving smaller environmental impact and higher green standards – could also be employed in other contexts, to properly preserve vital infrastructures and improve the quality of life of urban population.

Another aspect of cultural heritage management in relation to the environmental development would be the bigger awareness generated in the population about environmental issues, which would trigger a significant community responsibility, both in rural and urban contexts about the conservation of both cultural and natural landscapes and the use of natural resources.

4. International engagement and a possible role for the EU

Following a hiatus of almost two decades in the sector of international cultural cooperation due to tensions with the military junta, recently international organisations and states have resumed their engagement with Myanmar, providing assistance and leading projects in the fields of cultural heritage conservation and management. Among the projects implemented by international actors three will be hereunder presented and analysed, as they involve European states – although only one belonging to the EU – and are testimony of Europe's leading role in this field. These projects furthermore advocate for a greater engagement of the EU, both as donor and in designing collaboration and management projects in the field of safeguarding heritage in Myanmar.

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[42] mid Hribar, M., and Bole, D. (2012). *SY_CULTour, Check-list for evaluation of cultural values with regard to their developmental potential*, unpublished material cited in Scientific Research Centre of the Slovenian Academy of Science and Arts (2014). *Enhancement of Cultural Heritage through Environmental Planning and Management: CHERPLAN. D6.2: Environmental Planning Model for Cultural Heritage Sites in Southeastern Europe*. p.22. Retrieved from www.southeast-europe.net/document.cmt?id=809.

The first international project to be considered is "Capacity Building for Safeguarding Cultural Heritage in Myanmar", which is particularly important for the sake of this briefing as it involved directly one of the EU Member States. The project was subsidised by the government of Italy with a total budget of USD 533,332, and was implemented over the period from February 2012 to March 2012 by the UNESCO Bangkok Office, in collaboration with Myanmar's Department of Archaeology, National Museum and Library, and in partnership with the Italy-based international organisations International Centre for the Study of Preservation and Restoration of Cultural Property (ICCROM) and Lerici Foundation.[43] Designed to support Myanmar's implementation of the 1972 World Heritage Convention – ratified in 1994, but never effectively upheld – the project responded to high-priority needs of the Department of Archaeology, and the National Museum and Library, targeting specifically two of Myanmar's most important cultural heritage sites: the Bagan Archaeological Area and Monuments, and Pyu Ancient Cities. In view of the country's ultimate goal of nominating the two sites as UNESCO World Heritage properties – the latter of which was eventually awarded such status in 2014, the project raised technical capacity for heritage protection and upgraded Myanmar's capability to preserve and manage the mentioned heritage sites. Thanks to the contribution of Italy – a leading country in this field, ICCROM and the Lerici Foundation provided Myanmar's experts with exposure to the most up-to-date conservation practices, conducting world-class trainings in archaeological sites protection, World Heritage sites management, and safeguarding of mural paintings and stucco carvings. The hands-on trainings at Bagan and the Pyu Ancient Cities contributed to both the practical enhancement of the sites' conditions – consolidating the external stuccoes in Bagan and protecting the Khin Ba Mound slab in Sri Ksetra – and to a local capacity-building, with the promotion of technical know-how, higher conservation standards, and improved management practices. The project also helped to develop tools, guidelines and systems for managing the heritage sites in the long term, and entailed the translation and widespread dissemination of essential reference documents into Myanmar's language to facilitate a continued application by various national and local authorities.

The project also brought about the enhancement of institutional capacities, supporting national and local authorities strengthening their management capacities. With the participation of government officials from different sites on the country's Tentative List, the capacity building effort reached multiple institutional levels, and benefited also numerous other sites around the country. The establishment of networks between Myanmar and international institutions and actors will be essential to help the country's political and institutional progress, and facilitate the international engagement towards the achievement of international standards in the areas of heritage conservation and management, and cultural cooperation.

The second international project under consideration, somehow similar to the previous one, as it targets the major issue of capacity building for cultural heritage management in Myanmar, is "Institutional Capacity Building for Managing Bagan Within the World Heritage Framework". This project, currently on-going, was launched in 2012 by the government of Switzerland , the Nordic World Heritage Foundation, and the UNESCO Bangkok Office, and provides a total budget of USD 283,553.[44] The main purpose of this project is to strengthen the institutional capacities of the Department of Archaeology, National Museum and Library of Myanmar, to support the implementation of the 1972 Convention concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage, with a particular attention to the Bagan Archaeological Area and Monuments, in the light of its future successful bid as UNESCO World

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[43] Unakul, Rellensmann. *Capacity Building for Safeguarding Cultural Heritage in Myanmar*, pp.1-5
[44] UNESCO, *UCPD for Myanmar 2013-2015*, p.21

Heritage site. Whereas the main intent is to safeguard and support the nomination of Bagan by effectively implementing site management plans, and international measures and regulations, the project also tackles one of Myanmar's core necessities, that is strengthening the country's institutional and management capacities in different contexts, in order to release the country's potential for economic, socio-political development.

Finally, a third project involving European actors in the field of cultural heritage conservation in Myanmar is the "Inle Lake Conservation Project". This on-going project was financed by the Norwegian government with a contribution of USD 230,000 through the Nordic World Heritage Foundation, and is implemented by UNESCO in cooperation with the UNDP and the government of Myanmar.[45] The project focuses on improving the conservation and promotion measures at the Inle Lake cultural site, which has remained on the country's Tentative List for World Heritage status since 1996. Inle Lake is the second largest lake in Myanmar and is a vital part of the traditions, ecology and economy of the southern Shan state. Its well-preserved mountainous landscape is home to several ethnic groups – including the Innthar community, populations of Shan, Bamar, and other ethnicities, which use the lake and its shores as a central landmark, and as a focus for their cultural traditions and economic activities – navigation, fishing and commerce. Its traditional floating gardens, leg-rowed boats and its weaving industry, are well-renowned worldwide, and the annual, spectacular Buddhist festival taking place on the lake, represents a potential to make it a major tourist attraction and investment destination. The Inle Lake and its villagers constitute a genuine case of cultural landscape, but to unchain the potential of this heritage site, effective protection, management and enhancement plans are needed. With the support from Norway, outreach and training activities are being implemented to increase the awareness about World Heritage sites and participation of local communities to the site conservation. Building management capacities and achieve greater engagement – both from local institutions (state, township and district authorities) and civil society – is pivotal in order to safeguard the cultural assets, as well as biodiversity and local resources, of the Inle Lake basin, and move toward sustainable economic growth of the whole region. Although still at a preliminary stage, the project promises to have a significant impact on the cultural and environmental conservation and management in the area as well as on the state's sustainable development process, creating new economic opportunities for both tourism and investment.

European countries have demonstrated to hold a substantial experience in the field of cultural cooperation and safeguarding heritage, operating or financing international projects in Myanmar and elsewhere in the world. Nevertheless, the EU as a single actor has so far kept a rather low profile in the sector of external cultural policies in general, and has not yet engaged Myanmar with any plans concerning capacity building in this field. Indeed, despite having recognised the role of cultural heritage as a unique, non-replaceable, non-interchangeable strategic resource, important for a number of matters related to "cultural, environmental, social, economic and technological transformations that affect all aspects of contemporary life", much of the action conducted by the EU in this field has been internally oriented.[46] Reports indicate that the annual income generated by economic activities related to European cultural heritage tops EUR 340 billion and that nine million jobs are directly or indirectly linked to the sector of cultural tourism.[47] However, at the European level there seems to be a significant underestimation of the value of external heritage policies, not only for creating jobs and investment opportunities abroad, but also for a quality enhancement of

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[45] UNESCO, *UCPD for Myanmar 2013-2015*, p.23

[46] *Conclusions on cultural heritage as a strategic resource for a sustainable Europe.*

[47] Prista, L. (2011). *Cultural Heritage Within the EU Research Policy: Current State and Perspectives*. Presentation delivered on 24 March at the Net-Heritage Conference in Brussels. Retrieved from http://www.netheritage.eu/download/2_Prista.pdf.

the diplomatic relations at government, city and regional levels. This would be of primary importance in the case of Myanmar, given the country's richness in cultural heritage assets, and the promise made by the EU to help the transitional state with all political and economic tools available.

There is, however, a precedent of an EU-funded international project in the field of cultural heritage, designed to support a third country's recovery and development, which could possibly be replicated in Myanmar. In 2010, after the earthquake that severely hit the country, the European Commission granted support to the government of Haiti with a contribution of EUR 273,000, to promote strong regional policies aimed at creating regional culture clusters around major heritage sites and foster tourism, distribution and promotion of artistic creativity, and development of cultural, small-scale industries and associations focusing on the promotion of local tangible and intangible cultural heritage, popular traditions, literature, and festivals. [48] The project, additionally, helped to establish partnerships with the private sector and an inter-sectorial economic cooperation between EU and local businesses. This project, titled "Support for the Strengthening of Culture and Art for Economic and Social Development (ARCADES)", together with the creation of the International Coordination Committee for protecting Haitian Cultural Heritage under the auspices of UNESCO, not only helped strengthen the action of the Haitian government in the field of heritage conservation and management, but also attempted to design an all-encompassing, convergent and transversal policy, with the purpose of making culture and communication pillars of a new social and economic recovery and development plan for the country.

The project was furthermore designed to integrate a cultural dimension in measures to enhance all sectors of the society: education, social services, urban and rural development. In addition it created new development clusters that applied innovations, technical and managerial capacities from the heritage conservation sector to small-scale, industrial production. Therefore the project acted as stimulus for the development of all sectors, bringing together civil society and attracting interest and investments of cultural and tourism markets to Haiti, and ultimately enhancing local capacity building. Furthermore, the positive, dynamic, inclusive, and creative approach of this project, while contributing to the economic recovery and development of the country, it also bolstered social cohesion at a time of great crisis, and redefining a new and positive image of Haiti, both domestically and abroad. Successful outcomes, together with positive efforts and a good-willing attitude by the central government, also contributed towards instilling renewed trust into national institutions.

Considering these significant achievements, the promotion of an analogous project in Myanmar would be extremely desirable. The creation of cultural and creative hubs in the surroundings of the country's cultural heritage sites would indeed develop conservation and good management practices, thus guaranteeing the protection and promotion of the national heritage assets and boosting local cultural expressions. This would also fuel economic development in several other sectors related to tourism and creative industries, while at the same time help building social cohesion and political confidence in local and national institutions.

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[48] European Commission, British Council, Federation Wallonia-Brussels and European Union National Institutes for Culture. (2012). *Culture and Development - Action and Impact*. Brussels: European Commission, p.12

Conclusions

Myanmar is currently at an historical, delicate transitional point. Since its political opening-up in 2011, the country has shown some sincerely welcomed commitments to reengage the international community, and the path of economic/political reforms initiated by President Sein is proceeding slowly, but steadily. In the end this should transform Myanmar in a democratic state with greater civic participation, and furthermore unleash its great economic potential. Given its strategic geographical location, its untapped wealth in natural resources and a huge workforce, Myanmar could soon become a land of opportunities for both local and international businesses.

Myanmar's development process is nonetheless undermined by some long-lasting challenges – namely the dramatic economic backwardness of its peripheral regions, the lack of technological capabilities, a general mistrust toward the government, enduring ethnic and religious conflicts, the extensive social exclusion and discrimination, and the absence of any sense of belonging to the same nation among the people. Moreover, as the country's development process proceeds further, concerns of environmental deterioration due to pollution, unregulated construction and resource extraction are also emerging.

Numerous national and international cooperation and development projects are currently being implemented to help Myanmar overcome these challenges and effectively mobilise all available resources to support poverty eradication, promote income generating activities and investment and job opportunities, and strengthen social cohesion and environmental awareness. Still, few international projects have so far targeted the issue of conserving and promoting the country's tangible cultural heritage, despite it being one of the richest and the most diverse in the Southeast Asian region, and despite this form of heritage having long been acknowledged as an effective gateway for sustainable development by international experts and organisations.

After having explained in general terms the value of cultural heritage, the practical examples examined in this briefing paper have underlined the positive outcomes of the cultural heritage conservation and management projects for the sake of Myanmar's sustainable development process. Three development domains have been taken into specific consideration: economic, socio-political, and environmental development. While the conservation of cultural properties is considered a positive deed *per se* – as safeguarding specific historical and cultural settings helps preserving the link with a nation's historical memory, culture and traditions –, it also contributes to create economic opportunities in numerous sectors related to tourism, service and creative industries, and promotes peace, tolerance and environmental awareness.

Restoration and management policies for cultural heritage properties contribute indeed to the economic development of a country as they involve activities that encourage the employment of local artists and workers, financial and natural resources and that ultimately produce goods and services that are valued in economic terms. Well renovated and promoted sites become also attractive poles for tourism, culture, trade and entertaining activities, as well as for service supplying amenities. This helps the local economic sector to grow and also contributes to the improvement of the image of a city and region that eventually results in more visitors and investors. Economic benefits generated by heritage-related activities are thus not to underestimate and could greatly help in particular Myanmar's rural outer regions, where most heritage sites are located.

In addition, heritage also embodies an identity-promoting and civilisational dimension, and can act as both catalyst and tangible testimony of common history and cultural values among local communities, being the stage for mutual understanding, tolerance and social integration. Sharing a common history and cultural values fosters a sense of belonging to the same nation, which is essential for inter-communal dialogue, unity and peace in the country. Promoting minorities' identities through their cultural heritage would greatly contribute to strengthen the democratic process in the country and to its overall socio-political development. The promotion of multiple cultural identities, often marginalised and underrepresented, constitutes however a substantial challenge for Myanmar, and much will depend on future political developments – especially in relation to the outcomes of the general elections scheduled for 2015.

Finally, cultural heritage conservation and management would also be beneficial for Myanmar's environmental development, to protect and enhance its unique natural diversity and resources, often jeopardised by other economic priorities. Management schemes for heritage sites include indeed a key dimension of ecological assessment and sustainable spatial planning, designed in relation to the surrounding natural environment, and calling for higher standards over land and resource use in the proximities. Positive effects of these plans would be noticeable in both city centres – with more green areas and public parks near museums and cultural properties – and in peripheral rural areas.

The international projects presented in the fourth chapter, financed by European countries and implemented by UNESCO with other international partners, witness the leading role of Europe in the fields of cultural cooperation and safeguarding heritage, and call for a greater engagement of the EU as a single actor. Improved external cultural heritage policies are needed in order to create jobs and investment opportunities abroad, and for enhancing the quality of diplomatic relations. The EU-funded project in Haiti, aimed at safeguarding the local cultural heritage and at promoting creative clusters across the region, demonstrated to be very meaningful and successful. The implementation of a similar project in Myanmar is then extremely desirable, together with the development of a general and genuine strategy to integrate culture and cultural heritage into the EU development policies and global support programmes.

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