

Local Participation in Cultural Heritage Management

—文化遺産の管理における地域住民の参加に関する研究—

平成14年編入
Destination: Ethiopia
Organization: UNESCO
Belle ASANTE

Keywords: community participation, material culture, museums, Ethiopia

Summary of dispatch organization

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) was founded in 1945 with the aim of promoting international cooperation and capacity building among its member states. Ethiopia became a member state of UNESCO in 1955 and today the UNESCO Office in Addis Ababa is the Cluster Office to Djibouti and Ethiopia in the East African Cluster of field offices. The culture sector of UNESCO's Addis Ababa office has been integral to several tangible heritage and museums projects related to the researcher's PhD thesis.

Motivation for internship and pre-departure objectives

This research is a study in socio-cultural anthropology, which focuses on the dynamics of community initiatives in preserving/promoting a rich collection of vernacular arts in Ethiopian museums. Through extensive fieldwork beginning in 2002, I documented the variety of traditional arts in Harar, and investigated indigenous alliances in arts management in the city. For the sake of comparison, museums in Addis Ababa have also been included in my case studies.



Fig. 1. *Sherif City Museum* opened in 2007 in the historic Ras Tefari House in Harar.

Prior to dispatch, I hoped to observe and document UNESCO's activities related to a project to develop a new "City Museum", built upon existing collections in Harar; documenting this change would add valuable commentary to my research on community initiatives in heritage preservation. Moreover, I expected to gain practical skills in cooperation procedures between international agencies and local communities in the management of World Heritage Sites, and insight into collaborations in public presentations of artistic heritage.

Activities

Among my diverse activities during the dispatch period, I designed artists' profiles and exhibition posters, gained curatorial experience during two art exhibitions, drafted correspondences and press releases, and helped organize project reports. Furthermore, the internship in the culture sector of UNESCO's Addis Ababa office afforded me the chance to 1) observe the expertise required by international staff responsible for planning and implementation of major cultural heritage projects in Ethiopia; 2) share my knowledge on the important local initiatives in cultural heritage management in Harar (at a critical early stage in the re-structuring of the city along UNESCO's World Heritage guidelines); and 3) gain awareness of the donor agency's perspective as I developed my own analysis of the constraints and prospects for cultural heritage programming in the museums of Ethiopia.



Moreover, I was able to gain invaluable experience in cooperation with the international staff of UNESCO, senior culture sector officials in Ethiopia, museum administrators and contemporary artists.

Fig. 2. Visitors to the UN and ECA join the opening ceremony of “Art Exhibition for the Ethiopian Millennium”. This exhibition of contemporary Ethiopian artists was a major project during my internship period.

General impression of internship

The city of Harar became a UNESCO World Heritage Site in July 2006 and major restructuring of the physical environment and curatorial practices of the city have begun as a result of this accolade. Having documented and inventoried a great amount of the Harar’s material heritage, I approached this internship as a chance to share knowledge on the important initiatives in heritage management that the community of Harar had implemented prior to the present changes brought on by UNESCO’s World Heritage designation. The internship proved to be an opportunity to judge the extent to which a major donor organization attempts to integrate local participants in project management and implementation. In the course of my internship I was pleased to know that the staff welcomed an informed perspective on possible limitations of ongoing projects, and that, in the face of consistent constraints, commendable efforts are being made to promote and preserve community engagement in museum activities in Harar.



Fig. 3 & 4. Renovated city parks, and novel landmarks dot the landscape of Harar since the World Heritage Site designation. Visible changes in the city center include a map (left) placed by the regional government which declares: “Harar – The Living Museum” as its tagline, and the new structure representing the city’s five gates (right) in the roundabout of *feres magala* (horse market).

Degree to which objectives were achieved and reflections

During the internship mutual cooperation and transparency between the researcher and the host institution resulted to the achievement of my pre-departure objectives. I believe that my doctoral thesis (2008) gained a more holistic perspective from the knowledge acquired during the practicum assignments in Ethiopia.