HERITAGE AND THE GOVERNANCE AGENDA

Can Historic Urban Environments Survive the Devolution of Development Control?

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Abstract. This paper examines the capacity of a devolved planning system to mediate between the competing interests of conservation and development in historic environments. The paper focuses on recent developments in the British planning system and uses a case study of industrial World Heritage sites to explore the tension between localised decision-making, national objectives and international obligations. The paper concludes with a management framework for sustainable development in historic urban environments.

1. Introduction

Much has been made at a policy level, particularly in Britain and Western Europe, of the potential for historic environments to enhance social capital, promote social inclusion and contribute to sustainable development. . Indeed, urban and regional regeneration policy carries with it an implicit assumption that the empowerment and mobilisation of communities around a common heritage will spearhead physical change, social cohesion and economic revitalisation. The potential of heritage-led renewal as a vehicle for social change has coincided with moves toward more participatory modes of governance where the state acts in partnership with the private and voluntary sectors in the democratic management of local affairs. Some argue that the rise of governance has resulted from the failure of centralised government in dealing with social complexities. Others suggest governance is a neo-liberal vehicle for market driven rationality. Whatever the causes, participatory governance has the potential to impact on historic environments through the devolution of development control to local authorities.

This paper explores the capacity of a devolved planning system to mediate between the competing interests of development and conservation within historic environments. The paper focuses on recent reforms in the British planning system and uses a case study of industrial World Heritage Sites (WHS) to explore the growing tension between localised decision-making based on participatory governance, national objectives that emphasise the importance of the historic environment in social policy and international obligations to protect a common heritage of human kind. The paper concludes with a model for the evaluation of sustainable development in historic industrial and urban environments.

2. Linking Governance and Planning System Reforms to Historic Environments

The shift from government to governance refers to a move away from centralised and hierarchical structures of government towards more localised and collaborative approaches. This has the concurrent effects of blurring the boundaries between state institutions and civil society, changing traditional power balances between competing interest groups and rescaling economic activity from the national to the local level. Although much criticised, there are various reasons given for this shift including the belief that governance can provide greater flexibility, improve efficiency, enhance democratic participation and, ultimately, promote more socially cohesive and vibrant societies.

The largely assumed link between community empowerment through governance and greater social cohesion is of particular relevance to urban and

regional areas subject to the economic and social disruption associated with de-industrialisation. The inscription of five industrial WHS in Britain since 2000, all managed through collaborative inter-organisational partnerships, suggests the active use of heritage as a medium for community engagement and the revitalisation of depressed former industrial areas. Also aligned with this trend toward greater governance are the recent reforms to local government in Britain that have given a more central role to communities in shaping their own local environments through the planning system. This is significant for the management of WHS because planning systems have traditionally played a critical role in mediating between conservation and development interests.

3.Local Participation, National Objectives and International Obligations at World Heritage Sites

At a national level, England, Scotland and Wales all have planning policies that explicitly address the historic environment. The various policies cite the outstanding universal value and the authenticity and integrity of a WHS as a 'material consideration' in determining planning applications while the statement of outstanding universal value is referred to as a 'critical resource for local planning authorities' in the *PPS5 Historic Environment Planning Practice Guide*. In line with international obligations under the *World Heritage Convention*, the national planning policies also acknowledge that strategic and operational issues at WHS are managed through a planning process that reflects UNESCO's *Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention.* At a local level, recent reforms to local government process seek to enhance democratic participation and ownership by giving communities greater decision-making power in relation to development proposals. This is countered by statutory amendments that seek to improve the speed, efficiency and strategic focus of decision-making within the planning system.

While national planning policies are argued to provide adequate protection in Britain, there are no specific statutory controls relating to WHS in the various planning systems, the legal position of WHS management plans are ambiguous and the requirements for stakeholder participation, also a feature of the *Operational Guidelines* in relation to the sustainable use of WHS, are vague. Furthermore, despite apparent expectations in relation to economic and social regeneration, WHS are not integrated into broader national policy frameworks. Maintaining a balance between conservation at WHS and development interests in the wake of the devolution of power to local communities is further complicated by the strategic role played by local authorities and key landowners in the collaborative partnerships responsible for WHS management. What then is the possibility of achieving a balance in such a system when local aspirations potentially conflict with national objectives and WHS values ?

4. Case Study Methodology and Results

The research used a multiple embedded case study of six industrial WHS in England, Scotland and Wales. Criteria drawn from the literature on sustainable development, organisational theory and heritage management were used to define five dimensions of sustainable heritage management. These dimensions were then applied to a qualitative content analysis of the case study WHS management plans and a thematic analysis of physical surveys and interviews with WHS managers. In particular, the case study focussed on determining potential areas of conflict between a devolved planning system, national social policy objectives and WHS management obligations. The case study revealed evidence of the following significant issues for the sustainable management of WHS:

- A narrow engagement with external trends and issues.
- Limited use of formal strategic analysis techniques.
- Short-term and project specific management objectives.
- Independent responsibility taken by partnership organisations for the implementation of objectives.
- Limited integration of community values, needs and expectations into a strategic vision for each site.
- Restricted stakeholder participation in the development of objectives.
- The lack of a systematic evaluation and review process.
- Limited capacity to collect and analyse consistent data and generate meaningful performance indicators.
- The critical role of a site manager's enabling and orchestrating skills.

A model for the evaluation of sustainable development in historic industrial and urban environments is proposed to address these issues. The model incorporates a conventional approach to the development of sustainable development indicators within a collaborative decision-making framework. The framework is designed to engender a collective understanding and responsibility for a heritage resource, and provide data that allow a consistent evaluation of development objectives against heritage values so as to ensure sustainable heritage management.

5. Conclusions

The case study results indicate that the management of industrial and other complex heritage sites requires a broader approach to that proposed in Feilden and Jokilehto's (1998) *Management Guidelines for World Cultural Heritage Sites*, the publication which formed the basis of each case study site management plan. There was an inconsistency between the partnership structures currently in place at each site and the emphasis on community participation. Further inconsistencies were evident between the expectations for economic regeneration and social inclusivity, and the strategic planning and implementation capacities at each case study WHS. A model for the evaluation of sustainable development in historic environments will enhance the ability of managers to balance development objectives and conservation obligations within WHS.