ICOA1473: CONFLICT RESOLUTION BETWEEN HOST COMMUNITIES AND HERITAGE AUTHORITIES: THE APPLICATION OF SELFISH GENE THEORY IN HERITAGE

Subtheme 02: The Role of Cultural Heritage in Building Peace and Reconciliation

Session 1: Heritage as Peace Builder, Tying and Benefitting Community
Location: Silver Oak Hall 1, India Habitat Centre
Time: December 13, 2017, 14:00 – 14:15

Author: Sharif Shams Imon and Cora Un In Wong

Sharif Shams Imon teaches Cultural Heritage Management at Macao's Institute for Tourism Studies. He is also a visiting assistant professor at the Architectural Conservation Programme of the University of Hong Kong and the president of ICOMOS Bangladesh. He has an MBA and degrees in architecture, urban planning and urban conservation and research interests in urban conservation, management systems, public participation and heritage tourism. He has worked with ICOMOS, ICCROM, UNESCO, UNESCAP and governments internationally.

Abstract: Community participation has long been at the forefront of the sustainable development agenda. However, conflicts between communities and authorities over heritage conservation decisions have become a recurring heritage issue in recent decades. A major point of contention is the impact of proposed heritage projects on communities. Numerous case studies have shown that communities generally remain indifferent to heritage projects; but when they do react, they react at a very late stage, often taking drastic actions such as street protests or lawsuits, even when these projects are announced and public consultations are conducted in advance. Such indifference of communities towards heritage conservation negates the important tenet of community stewardship of heritage and allows the authorities to pursue a top-down heritage conservation approach.

This paper uses Dawkin's Selfish Gene theory – an influential theory originating from the field of evolution and biology that postulates that all human actions are to reduce organismal altruism in order to optimise self-preservation – as a framework to explain why, generally, communities remain indifferent towards heritage conservation but in certain situations show a strong reaction to it. This theory is used in the field of economics to explain the process of decision making and the purpose of adaptation. However, this paper is the first attempt to use this theory in a heritage field.

Two high profile urban heritage cases – one in Dhaka, Bangladesh and the other in Macao, China – are studied by adopting mixed-method research, including interviews and questionnaires, to understand the factors that influence communities' reactions to heritage projects. By comparing and contrasting the two cases from very different socio-economic and political contexts, the paper hopes to shed light on how early engagement of the public in a conservation project can be engendered and conflicts between communities and authorities avoided.

Key words: *conflict resolution, Selfish Gene, public engagement, decision-making*

Introduction

Community participation has long been at the forefront of the sustainable development agenda. However, conflicts between communities and authorities over heritage conservation decisions remain a recurring issue (Tunbridge, 1984). A major point of contention in heritage conservation is the real and perceived impacts of proposed heritage projects on communities. Case studies from developing countries show that communities often remain indifferent to heritage projects initially, and take drastic actions in the form of street protests or lawsuits very late in the project cycle (Ashworth & van der Aa, 2002; Imon, 2016; Nyaupane, 2009). Such indifference of communities towards heritage conservation negates the essential tenet of community stewardship of heritage and allows the authorities to pursue a top-down heritage conservation approach. It is thus important to understand why such differences in community participation in heritage conservation exist.

This paper uses Richard Dawkin's Selfish Gene theory (Dawkins, 1976) – an influential theory originating from the field of evolution and biology that postulates that all human actions are to reduce organismal altruism to optimise self-preservation – as a framework to understand why some individuals remain indifferent to heritage conservation efforts while others react proactively and strongly to them. This theory is used in the field of economics to explain the process of decision making and the purpose of adaptation. However, this paper is the first attempt to use the theory in a heritage field. Two high profile urban heritage cases – one in Dhaka, Bangladesh and the other in Macao, China – are studied to understand the factors that influence communities' reactions to heritage conservation. The paper aims to explain the variations that exist in the outcomes of public participation in heritage conservation practices and hopes to shed light on how a meaningful engagement of the public in a conservation project can be engendered and conflicts between communities and heritage authorities reduced.

The Selfish Gene Theory and community participation in heritage conservation

The selfish gene theory has been much canvassed but only in the studies of biology and human evolutions. It is a prominent theory in explaining the process and purpose of adaptation. Adaptation, in general, refers to any action undertaken that is made out of natural selection and for the function to maximise an individual's organism's fitness and the chance of continuous survival. Dawkins' work is an extensive articulation of Darwinism theory (Darwin, 1859) that adaptation is located at the level of the gene and the gene is embodied with an optimisation program which has predictive power for selecting the best or optimal outcome for an individual to survive. However, to Daly (1980), the selfish gene is a theory which concerns only one component of evolutionary dynamics in nature, but it does not take into consideration of other external environmental evolutions. Burt and Trivers (2006) report that genes do not always behave selfishly. To them, while genes play a crucial role in theories of adaption, this does not imply that genes behave selfishly as there are some actions undertaken that are due to social interactions and they can be altruistic and spiteful.

In Dawkins' words, one should see an individual as a selfish machine as he/ she is driven by the genes that have strong desire to survive. An individual is "programmed to do whatever is best for its genes as a whole" (Dawkins, 1976, p. 66). To Dawkins, there is no pure altruistic action to be undertaken by an

individual. All actions undertaken are simply for maximising the chance of survival for the genes. In other words, the gene is a fitness-maximising agent which drives an individual to take the best decision for getting a higher chance of survival even at the cost of exploiting the other individuals. On a group level, the individuals of the same species are willing to sacrifice themselves when they encounter life-threatened danger as posed by other species. On the surface, such an action appears to be altruistic. Dawkins suggests that it is simply due to the desire to keep the genes in the bodies of some close relatives alive. As further explained by Dawkins, "if animals live together in groups their genes must get more benefit out of the association than they put in" (Dawkins, 1976, p. 166).

This paper is not an attempt to prove or disprove if the genes are selfish in a biological metaphor. Instead, this paper builds on Dawkins' selfish gene theory and aims to explain the variations that exist in public participation in heritage conservation practices. In particular, the paper aims to reveal why some individuals are indifferent to heritage conservation practices while others may react proactively and aggressively.

Two cases

Shakhari Bazaar is one of the oldest trade-based religious minority neighbourhoods in Old Dhaka, Bangladesh. Its unique features include a unique built fabric composed of houses with very narrow street frontage and extremely long structures and traditional craft-based industries. Over several centuries, the predominantly Hindu community that lives there has created a cultural milieu that sets the neighbourhood apart from the rest of the areas of the historic core of Dhaka. However, over the past decades, and like the rest of the city, Old Dhaka has been undergoing a rapid urban transformation. The pressure to redevelop the dilapidated buildings in Shakhari Bazaar has also been very high. A collapse of a multi-storiedbuilding in 2004 that killed 19 residents triggered a kneejerk reaction from the government, 90 buildings were quickly identifiedunsafe, and notices were sent for their demolition. The residents had no participation in this totally top-down decision-making process. A controversial law listed many of the properties "abandoned" and thus under government custodianship putting the residents' rights in a precarious situation. There were no strong protests from the community. Under such threats of losing the cultural heritage of this traditional neighbourhood; a local group started a campaign to protect the buildings from redevelopment. The campaign involved extensive consultations with community leaders and residents, lobbying with government agencies and developing alternative plans. The community was supportive of the initiative as they saw this as a way to continue with their occupation of the buildings. In 2009, the area was declared a heritage site by the government imposing restrictions on demolition or major repair of buildings in the area without approval. The restrictions imposed by the declaration upset the property owners as they were unable to redevelop their properties, often with higher plot ratios. Now the property owners, who are a small fraction of the community, are demanding the removal of heritage designation of the area.

The 14 abandoned shipyards in Coloane, Macao have a history of almost 200 years. They fall into disrepair as the number of orders for wooden boats dwindled in the last few decades and the owners moved to other professions. An extensive development of Macao since its recent economic success has now made this dilapidated area an attractive site for redevelopment. Several alternative ideas for redevelopment, including housing and tourism facilities, are being discussed. During the process, the government started to dismantle the wooden structures of the shipyards. People who once worked in the shipyards were upset as the government did not take any initiative to protect their memory of the place. Many shipbuilding workers have retired as many of them are quite old at their 70s, some younger ones

have also changed to work in other professions as it has been a long time that there was no new orders after 2005. While it was sad news to close the shipyard factories, to those workers, they felt more frustrated for the fact that they never knew what the government intended to do with those factories. It seemed very unusual that the local authorities simply ordered to demolish the properties without meeting the residents and withoutan official notice. According to a 2011 government order, the shipyard owners are not allowed to remove anything from those factories. Each piece of wood was part of the investment for the factory owners, and it is sad for them that they could not earn anything by salvaging them. There was also nothing mentioned about monetary compensation or subsidies given to the owners and workers.

Concluding discussion

When a heritage conservation project encounters challenges, existing scholarly work seems to suggest that it is due to the adoption of an inappropriate managerial approach, in particular, the top-down managerial policy. They failed to explain why there are still different variations even if the same policy is adopted. For instance, a "top-down management" approach is often criticized for marginalising the voices of those who are powerless in participating in the conservation of heritage practices and resulting in public's strong opposition. Still, there are cases that the same managerial approach was adopted yet no protests or large-scale provocation was hosted in the end. Conversely, adopting a bottom-up managerial approach cannot guarantee that there will be a high level of public participation and the heritage conservation will be completed without challenges. Local authorities are often the ones to be blamed for not giving enough power to the locals whose life would be affected because of heritage conservation.

Dian and Abdullah (2013) claim that only people who live either in, within or near heritage sites know best how conservation plans are best carried out. They stated that the call for a bottom-up approach is essential and the success of public participation in the conservation of heritage sites depends on the power to influence decision-making. However, there are also cases which report that due to locals' lack of knowledge on heritage conservation, conflicting interests of various stakeholders and having low to no public's enthusiasm for heritage conservation. Consequently, some heritage projects which adopt a bottom-up approach encountered catastrophes; eventually, local authorities and or professionals would have to take the lead in some conservation projects (Wong, 2014; Yung & Chan, 2011).

In other words, while local authorities' empowerment is crucial in heritage conservation practices, public's participation is as well important in determining if the conservation project can be done successfully and sustainably. There is a lack of investigation to reveal why variations exist in public' participation in heritage practices. Importantly, adopting a managerial perspective fails to explain this variation. This paper, instead of focusing on the unit of community or public's participation, it examined specifically on individuals' decisions on participating or not in heritage conservation practices and the rationale for their actions based on Richard Dawkins' selfish gene theory.

Bibliography

Ashworth, G. J., & van der Aa, B. J. M. (2002). Bamyan: Whose Heritage Was It and What Should We Do About It? *Current Issues in Tourism, 5*(5), 447-457. doi:10.1080/13683500208667934
Burt, A., & Trivers, R. (2006). *Genes in Conflict*. Cambridge: Bdlknap Press.
Daly, M. (1980). Contentious Genes: A Commentary on The Selfish Gene By Richard Dawkins. *Journal of Social Biology Structure, 3*, 77-81.

Darwin, C. R. (1859). *On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection, or the Preservation of Favoured Races in the Struggle for Life*. London: John Murray.
Dawkins, R. (1976). *The Selfish Gene*. New York: Oxford University Press.
Dian, A. M., & Abdullah, N. C. (2013). Public Participation in Heritage Sites Conversation in Malaysia: Issues and Challenges. *Procedia- Social and Behavioral Sciences, 101*, 248-255.
Imon, S. S. (2016). Public Participation and Sustainable Urban Conservation. *Context: Built, Living and Natural, 12*, 21-30.
Nyaupane, G. P. (2009). Heritage complexity and tourism: the case of Lumbini, Nepal. *Journal of Heritage Tourism, 4*(2), 157-172. doi:10.1080/17438730802429181
Tunbridge, J. E. (1984). Whose heritage to conserve? Cross-cultural reflections on political dominance and urban heritage conservation. *Canadian Geographer / Le Géographe canadien, 28*(2), 171-180. doi:10.1111/j.1541-0064.1984.tb00783.x
Wong, C. U. I. (2014). The Preservation of Macau's Intangible Heritage: The Case of Patua. *Tourism, Culture and Communication, 14*, 91-102.
Yung, E. H. K., & Chan, E. H. W. (2011). Problem Issues of Public Participation in Built-Heritage Conversation: Two Controversial Cases in Hong Kong. *Habitat International, 35*(3), 457-466.

ICOA1473: RÉSOLUTION DES CONFLITS ENTRE LES COMMUNAUTÉS D'ACCUEIL ET LES AUTORITÉS DU PATRIMOINE: L'APPLICATION DE LA THÉORIE DES GÈNESÉGOÏSTES DANS LE PATRIMOINE

Sous-thème 02: Le rôle du patrimoine culturel dans la construction de la paix et de la réconciliation

Session 1: Le Patrimoine En Tant Que Constructeur De Paix, Communautaire De Types Et De Bénéfices
Lieu: Silver Oak Hall 1, India Habitat Centre
Date et heure: 13 Décembre, 2017, 14:00 – 14:15

Auteur: Sharif Shams IMON et Cora Un In WONG

Sharif Shams Imon enseigne la gestion du patrimoine culturel à l'Institut d'études touristiques de Macao. Il est également professeur assistant invité à l'Architectural Conservation Program de l'Université de Hong Kong et il est président d'ICOMOS Bangladesh. Il est titulaire d'un MBA et de diplômes en architecture, en urbanisme et en conservation urbaine, ainsi qu'en recherche sur la conservation urbaine, les systèmes de gestion, la participation du public et le tourisme patrimonial. Il a travaillé avec l'ICOMOS, l'ICCROM, l'UNESCO, la CESAP et les gouvernements à l'échelle internationale.

Résumé: La participation des populations est depuis longtemps à l'avant-garde des programmes de développement durable.Cependant, les conflits entre les communautés et les autorités à propos de décisions de conservation patrimoniale sont devenus un problème récurrent au cours des dernières décennies. L'impact des propositions de projets patrimoniaux sur les communautés constitue un point de désaccord majeur. De nombreuses études de cas ont montré que les populations restent généralement indifférentes aux projets patrimoniaux, mais que, quand elles réagissent, elles le font très tardivement et avec virulence, entreprenant des actions drastiques telles que des manifestations de rue ou des procès, même lorsque ces projets ont été annoncés et que des consultations publiques ont été menées à l'avance. Une telle indifférence des communautés à l'égard de la conservation du patrimoine remet en question le principe fondamental d'une gestion communautaire du patrimoine et permet aux autorités de poursuivre une approche descendante de la conservation du patrimoine.

Cet article utilise la théorie du gène égoïste de Dawkin - *une théorie influente issue du domaine de l'évolution et de la biologie quipostule que toutes les actions humaines visent à réduire l'altruisme organique afin d'optimiser la préservation de soi* - comme cadreexpliquant pourquoi les communautés restent indifférentes envers la conservation du patrimoine, sauf dans certaines situations qui les concernent où elles réagissent avec force. Cette théorie est utilisée dans le domaine de l'économie pour expliquer le processus de prise de décision et le but de l'adaptation. Cependant, cet article est la première tentative d'utiliser cette théorie dans le champ du patrimoine.

Nous étudions deux cas de patrimoine urbain de haut niveau - l'un à Dacca, au Bangladesh et l'autre à Macao, en Chine - en adoptant des méthodes mixtes, y compris des interviews et des questionnaires, pour comprendre les facteurs qui influencent les réactions des communautés aux projets patrimoniaux. En comparant les deux cas qui se situent dans des contextes socio-économiques et politiques très différents,

le document espère faire la lumière sur la façon dont l'engagement précoce du public dans un projet de conservation peut être engendré et les conflits entre communautés et autorités évités.

Mots-clés: résolution de conflit, gène égoïste, engagement du public, prise de décision