

# Common threads, different patterns

## A case study of cross-border heritage

*Catherine Leonard*

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We live in uncertain times. All around the world, conflict, disaster (natural and man-made), neglect, insufficient resources, poor planning and ignorance threaten many of the things we love. Not least our built, natural and cultural environments.

But against this background is a growing awareness of the value of collaborative action, both at national and international levels.<sup>1</sup>

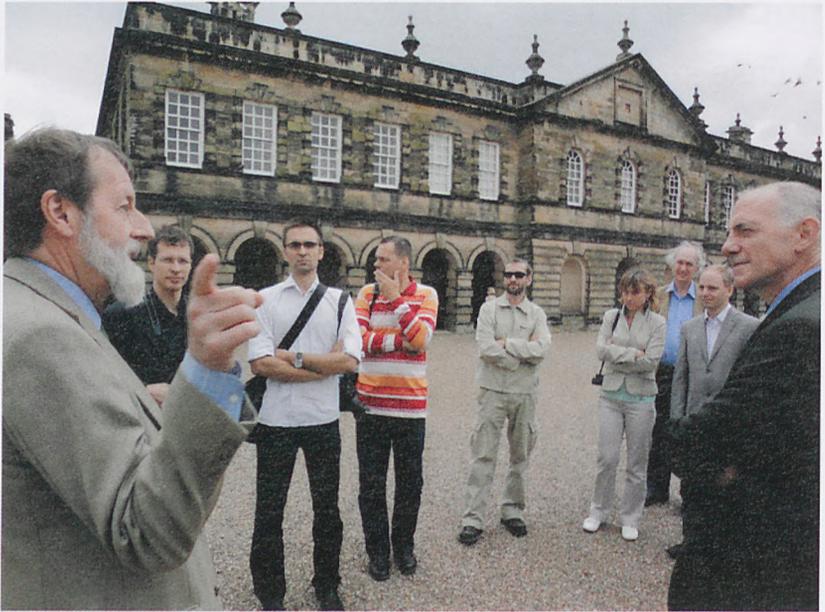
The very recent establishment of a National Trust organisation in South Africa by a coalition of regional heritage groups, and discussions about similar processes in Hong Kong, Syria, Taiwan, as well as here in Central Europe, show that the National Trust approach, built on community engagement and sustainability, is viewed by many as an important model.<sup>2</sup>

There is not a simple “one size fits all” solution, however, and the concept does not translate into every country exactly so that each place has to find its own solution. For example, the Indian National Trust, INTACH, focuses on facilitating conservation projects and education rather than protection through ownership. Our colleagues in the United States, while having around 30 historic sites that they open to the public, tend to support local preservation groups with national advocacy and fundraising, leveraging millions into conservation projects.

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1 June Taboroff, *Heritage Trusts: Creating Opportunities for Public Participation in Cultural Conservation, A Handbook*, p. 4 [September 2002], [http://into.nthp.webfactional.com/wp-content/uploads/2010/02/Heritage-Trusts1.pdf1\\_.pdf](http://into.nthp.webfactional.com/wp-content/uploads/2010/02/Heritage-Trusts1.pdf1_.pdf) (accessed June 2011).

2 Dave Cowley, *Presentation to the Consultative Workshop on the Feasibility of Establishing a National Trust for South Africa* [September 2009], <http://into.nthp.webfactional.com/wp-content/uploads/2009/02/NT-Annexure-E4b-Dave-Cowley-presentation.pdf> (accessed June 2011).



Participants at Seaton Delaval Hall, Northumberland  
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For what they are worth, the basic characteristics of a classic National Trust are: generally non-governmental (although may be chartered by the government and/or receive some state funding); often classified as a charity or foundation; help people and communities protect irreplaceable heritage; have a broad constituency or membership; have some role in heritage site stewardship or management; raise the profile of heritage issues and provide a view independent of government; run educational programmes and promote the enjoyment of heritage; and are an expression of civic engagement, through membership, donation or volunteering.<sup>3</sup>

The English National Trust is a big business with nearly four million members and a turnover of over 400 million pounds. Other INTO (International National Trusts Organisation) members are run on a shoestring by enthusiastic volunteers.

On an international level, heritage conservation is not something that can be neatly parcelled up into discrete national packages and practitioners around the world feel a sense of moral responsibility to share with

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<sup>3</sup> June Taboroff, *Ibid.*



Study visit participants at Culzean Castle, Ayrshire  
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others the experience, knowledge and skill they have amassed over the years. This is very much the background to INTO, a global family of heritage NGOs, which brings people together to exchange information, develop and promote best practice, and help each other in the achievement of their objectives.

An example of this is INTO's recent Cross-Border Heritage Conservation Collaboration programme. The National Trust in England, Wales and Northern Ireland is fortunate to have the Prince of Wales as its patron and as an outcome of His Royal Highness's visit to Central Europe last year, INTO brought together heritage practitioners from the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia, with partners in the UK to explore different approaches to finding a viable future for historic buildings and, perhaps more importantly, to exchange ideas and experiences between themselves.

The three keys to success which came out of the study visit were: community engagement (creating more opportunities for deeper connection with local people, listening harder to our supporters and engaging them more in the organisation's work); the development of essential conservation and craft skills; and securing funding and/or investment, including heritage-led local economic development.



Study visit participants at Seaton Delaval Hall, Northumberland  
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### **Community engagement**

It can be difficult for populations, particularly those suffering from one or several of the threats outlined previously, to believe that heritage matters. The Cross-Cultural Foundation of Uganda, an INTO member organisation, supports local community museums through its cultural heritage programmes. These initiatives, often undertaken by individuals or small groups in extremely difficult circumstances and with very little funding, demonstrate great enthusiasm for passing on, and learning from, the past.

The study programme spent most of their time at Seaton Delaval Hall in the north-east of England near Newcastle, owned by the National Trust, and at Dumfries House, a property in Scotland which the Prince of Wales helped save a few years ago. Local communities are central to both these projects.

To foster that crucial sense of belonging, participants learned that it is essential to change our mindset – from owning places *for* people, to owning places *with* them. Local people, who raised 3 million pounds following a huge public consultation, were the backbone of the English National Trust's campaign to save 18th-century Seaton Delaval Hall in Northumberland, and the public continue to play a central role in shaping plans for



Study visit participants meeting the Property Manager of Paxton House  
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the Hall's future. The study visit also contributed to very current debates about car parking and where to site the café.

The National Trust's latest strategy document focuses in on the need to strengthen that sense of belonging and connection. Over time, vital links have become frayed, for instance between a largely urban nation and its countryside and, worryingly in some cases, between properties and the communities which surround them. Participants took away ideas of how to rebuild these relationships and foster a greater sense of shared pride and ownership.<sup>4</sup>

At Dumfries House, high quality and scholarly conservation and craft work on the one hand, combines with local knowledge and the wisdom of nearby communities, who also volunteer their time, on the other. Every place is distinctive and must respond to local circumstances. Thus at Dumfries House an arrangement has been made with a national supermarket

4 The National Trust, *Going Local: Fresh tracks own old roads. Our strategy for the next decade* (2010), <http://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/main/w-strategy-next-decade-17-march.pdf> (accessed June 2011).

chain to farm the surrounding 700 acre estate, which will become a centre of excellence for farming research and bring significant economic benefits to the local area.

Our participants shared their experiences with similar projects including a programme involving volunteers reviving traditional building techniques at Uhrovec Castle in Slovakia and an ambitious initiative to rescue and reuse ruined 16th-century Sarny Castle in Lower Silesia. This project aims to create an economically self-sustainable model (a mixed use approach with accommodation for sale or rent as holiday lets, as well as to local people, and a gallery and workshops) which would, in contrast to a typical business venture, put strong emphasis on village regeneration, and which could be applied to save other architectural groups of similar type.<sup>5</sup>

### **The development of conservation skills**

Twenty years ago, the National Trust for Scotland (NTS) opened its masonry workshop at Culzean Castle with three main areas of responsibility: firstly, stonemasonry repairs to buildings on the Culzean estate; secondly, the production and use of lime mortars; and lastly, training apprentice stone masons.

The masonry workshops have recently expanded their remit by taking on projects outside Culzean, both for other NTS properties and private clients.

At Dumfries House, an ambitious mixed use sustainable development called Knockroon will hopefully serve as a model new community for Scotland, and 500 to 600 residential units are being built to recoup the 20-million-pound investment that was made. It is believed that this development will also create employment and help bring prosperity to the area, and in the longer-term generate profits for donation to charitable causes, once loans associated with the development have been repaid.

Over a hundred local boys and girls recently tried their hands at slating, stonemasonry, joinery, rendering and bricklaying. The project seeks to attract young people into the construction industry, with a bias towards traditional skills aided by new technology.

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<sup>5</sup> Marcus Binney, Kit Martin and Wojciech Wagner, *Silesia: The Land of Dying Country Houses*, Save Europe's Heritage, London 2009

## Securing funding and/or investment

The way everyone (visitors, local communities and donors) connect with historic places is changing, and heritage organisations are finding new ways to leverage financial resources, engage supporters and attract investors. Innovative investment schemes, such as the development at Knockroon, need funders who can see the long-term benefits that lie beyond the immediate risks.

Not all the money-making ideas that the study visit participants explored were so highly staked. The group learned about the Landmark Trust which rescues historic buildings at risk and gives them a new lease of life as places to stay in and experience. They saw private house-owners who had opened their doors to wedding parties and television crews. They learned of the importance of giving visitors what they want, even if it means “loosening” up our protectiveness. In some houses, visitors can indulge their urge to touch, play or read. In others they can cook, play the piano or have a game of snooker;<sup>6</sup> as well as use the all important adventure playground. The new garden at Alnwick Castle attracted 800,000 visitors last year and has injected an estimated additional 50 million pounds a year into the local economy.

At the end of the project, our participants took away with them hundreds of impressions, far too many to number, many of which they are perhaps not yet properly aware.

Putting aside obvious significant differences such as levels of public support, legal frameworks, sources of support, and cultural discontinuity, our participants reflected on the need to create more opportunities for volunteers; the capacity of heritage to generate employment; different methods of interpretation; how to increase visitor numbers and how to persuade the “experts” that commercial and more “mass appeal” activities can still respect historic values.

The study visit ended with a party at the Prince of Wales’s home in London and a report to the INTO membership at the 14th International Conference of National Trusts in Canada in October 2011. The INTO continues to plan the next steps for the project within the context of its own development, which focuses on three areas:

Firstly, the establishment of a fund, called the INTO Foundation, to support important conservation projects of our member organisations around the world.

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6 The National Trust, *Ibid.*, p. 9.

Secondly, the development of INTO's membership services (its programme delivery arm) through the biennial International Conference of National Trusts, and by running more INTO programmes such as the Central European Project.

And lastly, by becoming more active in advocating what is unique and special about the National Trust approach on the global stage.