

# The changing appeals of cultural heritage

*Gábor Soós*

**Gábor Soós** – has an educational background in the humanities and social sciences; PhD in English Literature, (2010); DEA in Philosophy, Paris Sorbonne University (1999); MA in English, ELTE University, Budapest (1996). He is a specialist in World Heritage affairs and Head of Division of International Cooperation, Public Relations and World Heritage Affairs at the National Office of Cultural Heritage in Hungary. Over the last ten years he has acquired wide-ranging professional experience in the implementation of the World Heritage Convention with the involvement of different stakeholders (communities, business sector, NGOs, and public agencies, etc.), and used this experience during the elaboration of the Hungarian World Heritage Act of 2011. He served four years as a diplomat and later as deputy Permanent Delegate of Hungary to UNESCO (2002–2006); he was Alternate Member of the Executive Board of UNESCO (2004–2006) and vice-chair of the series of intergovernmental experts' meetings (2002–2003) for drafting the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage. He is also qualified by the UNESCO Secretariat of the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage (2003) to conduct training and capacity-building activities concerning that Convention. He teaches on heritage courses in higher education both in Hungary and abroad.

# The changing appeals of cultural heritage<sup>1</sup>

Gábor Soós

*Not everything that counts can be counted, and not everything that can be counted counts.*

(a sign hanging in Albert Einstein's office at Princeton)

Public preferences and demands shape the discourses of public policy, and are in turn, also re-shaped by them. The field of cultural heritage is no exception from this self-evidence or even truism. This article seeks to present how current discourse about built cultural heritage (historic monuments) is in the process of being reshaped in Hungary and, perhaps, other V4 countries as well.<sup>2</sup> It looks at the ways in which protagonists seek and may seek to raise support for the protection of cultural heritage in our contemporary societies: how arguments and discourses have been and are changing especially due to the financial and economic crisis. Also, by putting this phenomenon in a broader post 1989 time horizon, systemic changes appear with regard to bearing the burden of the protection of cultural heritage. It is hoped that by raising and presenting this topic at the first edition of the Heritage Forum of Central Europe, regional dialogue and exchange of experiences can be launched along these lines so

---

1 This article is dedicated to Dr Judit Tamási, President of the National Office of Cultural Heritage, as a token of (it is hoped) mutually inspiring a working relationship. I also thank Dr Tamás Fejérdy for lively discussions on these issues especially during the long drives between Krakow and Budapest.

2 My direct experience and even engagement are from Hungary, although I have some indirect knowledge of similar tendencies in other Central European countries, mainly through working relationships in the V4 Cultural Heritage Expert Working Group that was set up in 2008, which has met regularly at least twice a year since then.

that a fuller view of the state of play can emerge, as well as the establishment of possible avenues of cooperation and courses of action.

In some countries of the former Eastern Bloc (for example, Hungary), the protection of historic monuments was re-introduced<sup>3</sup> in the late 1950s and 1960s as a kind of concession: although the *metier* and the discipline was a bit suspicious due to its “bourgeois” (as against the primacy of the proletariat) origins and that it seemed to be tainted with nationalism (instead of the internationalism of the workers), it was allowed to re-emerge as it served the interests of some of the reform-minded, somewhat liberal communist leaders, and allowed the image of the country to be tainted with some degree of openness, and could be seen as a character-trait of a “human-faced socialism”, as it was then termed. There was no need to explicitly spell out the economic and social *raison d'être* of historic monuments protection in the context of state-controlled, planned economy where all the major monuments were state-owned (confiscated from their owners post-1944) and all elements of the management of monuments (to use a somewhat anachronistic term) were state-run, such as control and licensing, planning, and implementation (of restorations, maintenance, etc.).

The situation changed drastically after 1990 and historic monuments protection (widely renamed in both the East and West, and expanded as *cultural heritage*<sup>4</sup> protection or management) had to re-position itself in

---

3 Of course, in most of these countries, monuments protection had a historic background: in Hungary, for example, the predecessor of the current state heritage protection institution, the Temporary Commission of Monuments of Hungary was established in April 1872. In 1957, when the National Inspectorate of Historic Monuments was established, such continuity was, of course, not emphasised.

4 The concept of “cultural heritage” has undergone significant changes over the past decades, the reasons of which point in many (political, social, cultural, etc.) directions. Cultural heritage has come to mean not only built and monumental heritage but also other forms and expressions of human creativity and culture, and has thus become a complex, multiply ramified term. The concept of “monument” originally grounded in aesthetics and history has been broadened and transformed to include non-artistic categories (for example, industrial heritage and cultural landscape) and quite specific areas (such as underwater cultural heritage), which points to the fact that the definition was not exclusively aesthetic even at the outset, but had room for historical (antiquities, historic monuments, monuments historiques) and even political (nation- and state-building) approaches in its application from the 19th century upto the present day. From the 1970s, the concept of “cultural heritage” as an umbrella term gradually either replaced or contained that of (historic) “monument” (cf. below the Hungarian and Slovak acts for examples). Even more open to new meanings and new subject matter, including living

the public arena, with this process not seeming to have ended. From a concession and seeming self-evidence of a state-run economy, it re-emerged as a valuable tool of the nation re-building of the 1990s, and it must now accommodate itself to and hopefully negotiate its way through the harsh realities of the financial and economic crises of 2008 and onwards, when it risks becoming marginalised as it is seen as redundant in strictly pragmatic-economic terms. It is in this context that the protection of cultural heritage must regain *droit de cité* and mobilise resources (human and financial) for its existence and deployment. Therefore it comes as no surprise that its protagonists have begun to use pragmatic-economic arguments in favour of cultural heritage protection.

In current public discourse the protection of historic monuments or, more broadly speaking, cultural heritage<sup>5</sup> is on the defensive: although it is a traditionally established field of public policy worthy of the support of public authorities, a certain logic of the “leftover”, of the “remnant” is

community culture through the concept of “intangible cultural heritage”, this concept has kept gaining scope parallel to and as a consequence of the increasingly wide-spread recognition of the anthropological (not purely aesthetic) concept of culture. For more on this and the link with intangible cultural heritage cf. my article “The Relevance of the Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage (2003) for Cultural Diversity”, in: *Heritage for the Future International Conference Hungarian National Assembly 25 November 2010 Proceedings*, (trans. Péter Pásztor), ed. Klára Papp-Farkas, Budapest 2011, pp. 87–101. As well as, “From World Heritage to Intangible Cultural Heritage: Global Trends Towards a New Heritage Paradigm?”, in: *Protecting and Safeguarding Cultural Heritage. Systems of Management of Cultural Heritage in the Visegrad Countries*, edited by Jacek Purchla, Krakow 2011, pp. 73–100.

- 5 In the Hungarian Act No. LXVI from 2001 on the Protection of Cultural Heritage, “the elements of cultural heritage” are defined as comprising of archeological heritage, historic monuments, and moveable cultural goods. In the Slovak Act No 49 from 2002, the term “cultural heritage monuments” is employed in a similar sense: “§ 2. Basic terms (1) The term “monuments and historic sites” shall mean the set of movable objects or immovable property declared as national cultural heritage monuments (cultural heritage monuments), historic reserves and historic zones. (2) The term “cultural heritage value” shall mean the aggregate of historic and social value, value in relation to landscapes and townscapes, architectural, scientific and technical value and value for the visual and applied arts meriting individual or territorial protection. (3) For the purposes of this act, the term “cultural heritage monument” shall mean a movable object or immovable property possessing cultural heritage value, which has been declared a cultural heritage monument in order to ensure its protection. In the case of an archaeological find, a non-uncovered movable object or non-uncovered immovable property discovered using the methods and technology of archaeological research may also be considered a cultural heritage monument.” [http://www.wipo.int/wipolex/en/text.jsp?file\\_id=242670](http://www.wipo.int/wipolex/en/text.jsp?file_id=242670) (accessed April 12th 2012).

employed when it comes to the allocation of resources, as the sector is deemed to play a marginal role in the realisation of the goals and aspirations of public policy: cultural heritage may be served from what is left when the other fields are taken care of.<sup>6</sup> The current key-words of both public discourse and public policy are the growth of GDP, the creation of jobs, the increase of employment rates and of competitiveness of businesses, the levelling of economic disparities between regions, etc. and, at best, the protection of the environment and sustainable development. It is therefore a matter of crucial concern that heritage protection repositions itself in this context with clear indications to its links and connections with the above key-words, and that a contemporary *apologia patrimonii* be developed.<sup>7</sup> It is the nature of such apologies that has recently changed.

Traditionally, arguments in favour of the protection of historic monuments/cultural heritage have tended to foreground the aesthetic-artistic or the socio-political aspect and thus invoked moral values and moral imperatives in their favour: monuments are to be protected because of their intrinsic aesthetic, artistic, or historic value, and because they help to create and sustain the cohesion of political communities, eminently, but not exclusively, that of the nation. This argument warranted by the fact that cultural heritage is always constituted in the context of a community and its recognition is often constitutive of the very community itself (or in its redefinition). The evolution of the European concept of monument/heritage/*patrimoine* went hand in hand with the establishment of modern nation states and some of its public institutions. This way, heritage always had a social value and usefulness (if you so wish), just as national language and literature, the arts, national administration and

---

6 Professor Jacek Purchla, the original mastermind of our Forum has published widely on heritage and economy. In *Heritage and Transformation*, (Krakow 2005) he describes the situation in Poland as follows: "Even among the political class, culture is very often perceived mainly as ballast or a traditional burden on the state budget." (p. 9. italics mine; see also p. 10 and passim). He describes a situation in which successive governments have "determinedly defended culture from the free market instead of building a market for culture". (pp. 11-12) Of such links, there is more below.

7 The suggestion is also inspired by the French title of a recent conference organised in Hungary: *L'Apologie du patrimoine architectural. Société en changement – protection du patrimoine en changement?* The conference proceedings are published in: *Az épített örökség védelmében. Változó társadalom – változó műemlékvédelem? / L'Apologie du patrimoine architectural. Société en changement – protection du patrimoine en changement? / The Protection of Architectural Heritage. Changing Society – Changing Concepts of Historic Monuments Protection?* edited by Magda Ferch, Budapest 2011.

the army did. Monuments protection and the legal texts grounding it since the mid-1800s were based on the concept that there are certain elements of cultural heritage value whose significance goes far beyond their value to their immediate owners and has relevance for the whole of society, the national community. Heritage and community is a two-way street: heritage may create and nourish a community (be it local, regional, national or even beyond, cf. World Heritage or the more recent European Heritage Label) and the community sustains and manages its heritage. Heritage may also reflect the diversity of the communities that form a given society, including their ethnic or religious diversity.

The link between heritage and society is also at the core of the *Council of Europe Framework Convention on the Value of Cultural Heritage for Society* (more widely known as “Faro Convention”, 2005), which in Art. 2b defines heritage community as “consist[ing] of people who value specific aspects of cultural heritage which they wish, within the framework of public action, to sustain and transmit to future generations.”<sup>8</sup> The explanatory report to the Convention explains that

6. The idea of the common heritage of Europe allows an approach to the notion of “heritage communities”, for there can be no cultural life without a community (Article 27 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights). A heritage community is defined here as a variable geometry (Article 2b), avoiding reference to ethnicity or other rigid communities. “Heritage communities” here are therefore a very different concept from “the heritage community”, the term sometimes used to encompass all professionals engaged in heritage-related activities. This Convention concentrates upon the benefits of developing co-operation between the diverse heritage communities which occur within Europe.<sup>9</sup>

In the context of the Faro convention, the value of cultural heritage for society also implies that cultural heritage may also serve certain purposes

---

8 And quite significantly, the title of the next article is “The common heritage of Europe”. The Convention is available at <http://conventions.coe.int/Treaty/Commun/QueVoulezVous.asp?NT=199&CM=8&CL=ENG> (accessed April 12th 2012).

9 Available at <http://conventions.coe.int/Treaty/EN/Reports/Html/199.htm> (accessed April 12th 2012).

in society: to build a more democratic open, and responsible society, to promote a sense of belonging or even the development of new heritage communities; to encourage dialogue among such communities and to reconcile diverging interpretations of elements of cultural heritage; and to improve the quality of life, of the environment, to boost the economy in a sustainable way, to contribute to the evolution of the information society, etc.<sup>10</sup>

Society and heritage may have diverse “values” or rationales for each other. In my opinion, in recent years and in our own times, we may witness a change and a shift of emphasis with regard to why heritage is important for society. While traditional arguments about national, local or regional levels of community, about aesthetic, cultural, historical or even political values continue to be referred to, new arguments have also emerged and have grown in their emphasis. These focus more on the *economic* potentials of heritage and thus the varied or even changing (?) appeals of cultural heritage can be observed. Literature in this sense is growing as well as policy level action in many European countries.<sup>11</sup> Donovan D. Rypkema’s *The Economics of Historic Preservation. A Community Leader’s Guide* (National Trust for Historic Preservation, Washington, D. C., 1994) probably set the tone and the basic parameters of such studies when, as against those who compared talking about “economics” in relationship to cultural heritage to eating one’s dessert with a salad fork, in the Introduction to the First Edition he wrote:

That is not to suggest that somehow the economics arguments for historic preservation are more important than the aesthetic, cultural, social, political, or historical ones. In the grand scheme of things, the economic arguments are probably less important than the others. [...] But as preservationists we are faced daily with another tangible set of facts. 1) Far more historic buildings merit being saved than can possibly be museums. 2) There are not nearly enough tax dollars to save all the buildings that ought to be preserved. 3) Most historic buildings are not owned by historic preservationists. Consequently, as preservationists, we have to make our case for the preservation of historic properties to those who don’t necessarily talk our preservationist language.

---

10 Cf. Articles 7–14 of the “Faro Convention”.

11 Cf. a brief survey article by Ildikó Deák, “Válság és örökségvédelem” (Crisis and Heritage Protection), published in “Gyújtópont”, 2010/06 (2010.02.10).



In fact, we have to make the case in their language. More often than not that is the language of economics. Think about who controls the future of historic resources: property owners, bankers, elected officials, economic developments directors, business people, chamber of commerce executives, planning and zoning officers, real estate brokers, and taxpayers. What do those people want to know? How much will it cost? How much will it make? How much will it save? If preservationists cannot respond credibly to those questions, more and more historic resources will be lost.<sup>12</sup>

So the economic argument appeared as a pragmatic *must* and it is used with more and more insistence since the financial and then economic crisis began in 2008. Some of the elements of the argument distilled by Donovan Rypkema focusing mainly on the rehabilitation of downtown historic buildings have, however, maintained their relevance. Without going into detail, these are as follows: • job creation, increase in household income • heritage visitors spend more money (Preservation as Tourism Strategy) • solution to the housing crisis (Preservation and Building Economics) • Main Street approach is the most cost-effective development from scarce public resources (Preservation as Downtown Revitalisation and Neighbourhood Business District Revitalisation) • property values sustained.<sup>13</sup>

In the next part of this article I would like to present two more recent European surveys seeking to assess the economic potential of cultural heritage. The surveys confirm and supplement Rypkema's arguments.

Published since 2001, *Heritage Counts* is an annual survey of the state of England's historic environment,<sup>14</sup> and each year it explores the role of the historic environment in wider social and economic agendas. It is produced on behalf of the Historic Environment Forum. *Heritage Counts 2010* drew on new evidence to explore the economic impact of the historic environment. Its key findings are as follows:

---

12 Rypkema, *Ibid.* Quoted from the 2008, 4th edition, pp. 3-4.

13 Rypkema, *Ibid.* pp. 2-3. cf. also the chapter titles of the book.

14 Cf. <http://hc.english-heritage.org.uk/What-Is-Heritage-Counts/> (accessed April 12th 2012). In 2011 the theme is the historic environment and Big Society. The 2010 volume as well as related research reports are also available on the above website.

- Historic places are attractive to businesses and visitors.
- Investment in historic areas delivers economic as well as environmental benefits.
- Every one pound directly invested in the historic environment contributes on average an additional £1.60 to the local economy over a ten-year period.
- Investment in the historic environment improves the way people feel about places (place-making catalyst).
- Investment in historic visitor attractions has an economic impact on the wider community: half of the jobs created by historic visitor attractions are not on the site but in the wider economy.
- Every one pound invested in heritage attractions generates an extra £1.70 in the wider economy.

Other reports,<sup>15</sup> made in France and using a different methodology, have also insisted on inscribing preservation of historic monuments in the wider framework and dynamism of the spatial and social, and hence also economic environment. The French study structures impacts on social and economic ones (the figures given here refer to 2007 in France Metropolitan without Martinique, Guadeloupe and French Guyana):

- Social impacts: 500,000 jobs generated by heritage of which • 33,000 are directly linked to heritage sites (staff, guides, civil servants, etc.) • 280,000 are indirectly linked to heritage sites (catering, tourism, research, specific skills, etc.) • and a further 187,000 jobs generated by the above.
- According to the French study, one job created in the heritage sector creates 15 further jobs.
- Economic impacts: 21,100 million euros generated by heritage: • 500 million directly (entrance fees, guides and audio-guides, bookshops, events) • 20,610 million indirectly (catering, tourism, *métiers d'arts*).
- Public expenditure on cultural heritage: 680 and 760 million euros: • 227 million euros state finance for restoration • between 454 and 530 million euros for local authorities.

---

15 To the best of my knowledge the first of such reports was elaborated under the auspices of the heritage Agency of the Provence - Alps - Côte d'Azur Region and published as 01. *Cahiers Agence Régionale du Patrimoine Provence - Alpes - Côte d'Azur*, Novembre 2005. <http://www.impact-patrimoine.fr/document/cahier01.pdf> (accessed April 12th 2012). Based on the methodology elaborated, a national survey was also prepared and published as *Etude nationale des retombées économiques et sociales du patrimoine*, Paris 2009. Similarly to the UK website of *Heritage Counts* above, a platform of exchange on methodological guidance and a database was established (<http://www.impact-patrimoine.fr/index.php?sousMenuA=0>) parts of which, however, are accessible only with a password.

- According to the French report one euro invested in the restoration of heritage generated between 28 to 31 euros.

The economic advantages of heritage-based development are multiple:

- high demand on human workforce and skilled labour, use of local resources – the gains and profit may remain locally mobilising small- and medium-size enterprises
- stable, diversified economic development going against cycles of financial and economic crises (anti-cyclical)
- heritage builds and sustains the local community and may be efficient both for small and big towns, as well as landscapes.

### **Conclusion**

In the perspective of these surveys and the economic-pragmatic arguments in favour of investing in the historic environment, heritage policy is perceived to take part in an integrated territorial policy of dynamisation, revitalisation, and attraction. In this approach, cultural heritage is not simply to be retained as an object of merely symbolic value, but is to be used as a *liability and an asset* so that it may also become part of a dynamic process of service production (be it artistic, cognitive, leisure, etc.). This process may sometimes be critically viewed (and often rightly so) but there is a growing tendency to conceive and assess restoration programmes in terms of the kind of functions the heritage buildings and sites can accommodate. Looking from a wider perspective of long-term sustainability, cultural heritage must find its function, respond to contemporary need and ensure its economic viability. This does not mean that the economic arguments in favour of heritage have some sort of supremacy over the aesthetic, cultural, historic, political (in brief, symbolic ones). It is rather the case that as Donovan Rypkema put it: “In the grand scheme of things, the economic arguments are probably less important than the others.” But “as preservationists, we have to make our case for the preservation of historic properties to those who don’t necessarily talk our preservationist language. In fact, we have to make the case in their language.”<sup>16</sup> And all the more so since the allocation of public resources including those from European Union funds is following a logic of socio-economic sustainability where cultural heritage as a specific and segmented area of intervention often finds it difficult to attract and receive financial support.

---

<sup>16</sup> Both quoted above.

The catchwords of a more successful strategy for attracting financial support may be along the lines described above: integrated territorial policies aimed at revitalisation and regional development based on partnerships with other relevant sectors such as tourism, catering, communications, etc. as well as other spheres of public policy such as spatial planning, environment protection, and traffic management, to name but a few. As we are approaching the next cycle of EU-level planning (2014–2020) the tendency also seems to emerge that funding is to be structured more and more on a territorial/regional basis encouraging the cooperation and integration of the different public and private sectors. For a cultural heritage policy to succeed in such a context, it must develop a voice that resonates well among heritage specialists, policy-makers and politicians, as well as businesses and the public at large. It must also learn to make alliances with suitable partners along converging interests in the hope that such alliances may amplify its own voice and thus help to have a positive impact on decisions affecting our common historic environment.