

### 3. WORLD HERITAGE AND LOCAL COMMUNITIES – CONSULTING, INVOLVING, PARTICIPATION

---

## Inclusion vs. Exclusion. Overcoming Undemocratic Contextual Issues in Integrating Local Communities into Heritage Management and Conservation

**Anna GAYNUTDINOVA**

#### *Abstract*

The article presents the retrospective of various initiatives of engaging local communities in heritage conservation and management taking place in Russia over the last decades. It gives the analysis of their sources, locations and developments in the light of contextual issues of the contemporary social and political circumstances and their influence to the conservation field. It also represents the summary of more than 50 years-long practice of local community engagement in the conservation of WH property “Cultural and Historic Ensemble of the Solovetsky Islands” from the period before it was designated till present.

**Keywords:** Community, Development, Participation, Equity.

In a time when local communities involvement is considered essential globally, in Russia we are witnessing the reverse process of reducing the legal possibilities for the expression of the citizens’ free will concerning heritage properties conservation and management, and pushing the public out of conservation field itself, on both state and local levels which appears at least counterproductive in terms of heritage conservation.

There is a general idea about local communities that exist among Russian authorities regarding their role and willingness to be engaged in cultural heritage conservation and management which, in a nutshell, comes down to the statement that locals are not interested, they should not be bothered and would not be engaged, the only way is to solve the problem for them, and let them “enjoy” the results. The objective of the article is not to go into details of the causes from where this idea emerged. We just note the fact. The important point is that this rhetoric about the fundamental difference of Russian context regarding local communities and cultural heritage conservation, which is often used to justify the process of their exclusion, is not supported by surveys and research.

However, certain Russian context certainly exists and its main aspects regarding a bunch of terms related to cultural heritage and local communities are as follows:



- residents of small provincial towns and villages show an exceptionally high level of local patriotism which is, however, almost completely deprived of cultural dimension (which practically means that they are proud of the local factories, mineral assets and battlefields at best but not of monuments, sites, traditions or historical figures);
- the cultural heritage is not considered as a public good by the majority of the public. Thus, in the context of profound problems and issues of conservation field itself (like the lack of legal mechanisms of protection of cultural landscapes and buffer zones of World Heritage properties, disruption of cultural heritage in historic cities under the pressure of building boom and rapid urbanisation process, the lack of funding and professionals in regions which lead to the demolition of both cultural heritage and infrastructure facilities and close the possibilities of turning the urbanisation process into the opposite direction, etc.), the fact that our cultural heritage is not inherited by the major part of the Russian society appears even more ominous;
- in the face of the above-mentioned issues, the exclusion of local communities and, in a broader sense, public from the decision making process concerning cultural heritage is very alarming.

To crown it all, we have to state the absence of coherent and sufficient government policy concerning the engagement of local communities in the cultural heritage conservation, which is sad but consistent in the light of contextual issues mentioned above. That is why NGOs and charity foundations play the major role in that field.

The article represents the results of the survey of local communities' engagement in the cultural heritage conservation and management. The survey took the form of a massive case study. During this study, more than 2 thousand cases from all around Russia that had been launched in the past 5 years were observed and analysed. All the cases included into the survey were either examples of grassroots movements aimed at local heritage conservation or some sort of spontaneous initiatives supported by one of the charity foundations.

The key findings of the survey confirm the results of similar studies, conducted in different parts of the globe, overall<sup>1</sup>.

(i) the communities, located in small towns and villages, respond to the initiatives launched by their neighbours quicker and are more productive than the residents of big towns or cities.

---

<sup>1</sup> For instance, various English Heritage researches or the ones included into the CHCE Full Report. Cultural Heritage Counts for Europe Consortium. 2015. *Cultural Heritage Counts for Europe Full Report*, Krakow: the International Cultural Centre Krakow [accessed 28 December 2018]. Available at: <[http://www.encatc.org/culturalheritagecountsforeurope/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/CHCE\\_FULL-REPORT\\_v2.pdf](http://www.encatc.org/culturalheritagecountsforeurope/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/CHCE_FULL-REPORT_v2.pdf)> (ISBN 978-83-63463-27-4)

(ii) the degree of responsibility for the local heritage and the level of its inheritance, so to speak, is much higher among local residents of (a) historic towns, where historic environment remains almost unspoiled by contemporary urbanisation or (b) educational and intellectual level of major part of residents is higher<sup>2</sup> or (c) cultural institutions (open air museums, for instance) play the role of the key employer or the city-forming enterprise.

During this study, certain resemblance between grassroots initiatives, undertaken in similar areas, was brought up to light. The preservation of historic environment in these areas was indicated as uniting feature for spontaneous selection of the main target of the initiatives. On the base of this point, we marked out three major groups of areas and three groups of initiatives corresponding to them. The three groups of areas are the following: (i) territories with well-preserved historic environment; (ii) territories where historic environment was demolished or abandoned by the residents, but still exists in the memories of elders if not in physical form; (iii) territories free of evident historical environment<sup>3</sup>.

Spontaneous initiatives of the local residents in the areas with well-preserved historic environment in majority of cases were targeted at the conservation and development of the local cultural heritage.

Among the grassroots movements of this group, one of the most successful examples, which was included as such in the UNESCO report for the UN conference Habitat III, is *Tom Sawyer* fest. It was established in Samara in 2015 and over the next 3 years spread to 27 historic cities and towns all over Russia. The initiative is aimed at raising awareness of heritage valuableness and its issues among locals and has a form of a festival of restoring of the historical environment by the volunteers from amongst locals at the expense of the sponsors who usually are local businesspeople. The key principle of the festival is that it should remain a grassroots initiative, and it is vital for the founders that the idea of restoring historical environment should come from local residents and not from the authority, or fit into some business scheme. During these years, several dozens of historic building have been selected by locals and restored by them under the supervision of the professionals.

The second initiative we would like to mention here is “The Image of the Old Town” from historic town of Kargopol. At the beginning, the initiative was tar-

<sup>2</sup> As an example of this kind of towns we refer to the so called “scientific towns” which were built all over the country during 1960-1970s to provide accommodation for the families of scientists employed by the scientific institutions established in the same area like Protvino, Chernogolovka, or Pushchino in the Moscow district, for instance. All of them were built near the Scientific Research Institutes of Physics, Chemistry or Biology.

<sup>3</sup> By this kind of areas are meant mainly scientific or military towns which were built at the free undeveloped territory, with almost unchanged primordial natural structure.



geted to raise awareness of the owners of historic buildings to their valuableness. However, in the course of its unfolding, it was discovered that the owners were aware neither of their responsibility for the heritage they own nor of the way to fulfil the obligation of its maintenance. Eventually, the initiative took form of creating the “Bylaw of the Old Town” – the sort of manual of urban guidelines and restoration requirements which were based on legal requirements, but represented them in a more direct and illustrative way to be easier to use and understand. Local residents and the local authorities together participated in the development process of this manual which was very reassuring and made promises of mutually beneficial cooperation between parties in the future.

In the areas where the historic environment has been either demolished or abandoned during the past few decades, but the elder generation still holds the memories of the past, the initiatives were usually focused on how to preserve these memories and to establish the associations between them and the material objects still remaining in the area.

We would like to mention two initiatives here: “Gubakha ALIVE. Stories of miners’ town” and “The Voices of the Siberians”. The first one was rediscovering the old miners’ town The Old Gubakha which was abandoned 80 years ago and became the ghost city. In the course of the project, the participants, mainly young people who live in New Gubakha, reconstructed the story of the old town by studying archive documents and by collecting memories of their elder relatives who had lived in the old town. Their archive research and memory collection came down to several incredibly popular among locals and tourists open air exhibitions of old photos from family archives and a number of guided tours through the old town which connected its sites, objects and buildings with the memories of the former residents. “The Voices of the Siberians” was very similar to the previously described project in a way, but it was mainly focused on the intangible heritage: memories of the residents of several abandoned villages. This very valuable collection formed the basis for the web site<sup>4</sup> which is being constantly filled up with new memoirs and represents an interactive map with pinned photos and marks of remaining objects.

In the areas free of evident historical environment, the focus of initiatives was on identifying the values of the place which most of the residents could share. The locals searched out and identified the specific attributes both tangible and intangible, places, natural and architectural objects and sites which could contribute to the significance of the area. At the same time, their research usually brought out one or another historical object, located distantly but obviously abandoned. The locals took responsibility for it and became involved into

<sup>4</sup> <https://xn--80acdb0abod0abfwib8s.xn--p1ai/> or <https://голосасибиряков.рф>



**Figure 1.** Kuchepalda. A bird's eye view. Photo by Vadim Razumov. *(Two centuries old timber village in Karelia. Now abandoned by residents. Highly treasured by art historians who had been trying and restoring its houses as volunteers for several years)*



**Figure 2.** Kuchepalda. House. Photo by Vadim Razumov



its maintenance and conservation. It is actually impressive and also encouraging that people facing the absence of so called true historic environment under certain conditions begin to create their own heritage, cover the area free of such environment with a layer of myths, values and significance and also adopt some neglected heritage properties.

During this study, we came to the conclusion that facing artificially created negative and, we might say, heritage-unfriendly circumstances, where the opportunities to express free will were reduced, modest, though, strategically well-considered, and the constant financial and consulting support from NGOs and/or charity foundations contributed to the process, when local communities were willingly seeking the way or chance to fill the void where the heritage had to be. Their local patriotism and sense of belonging was getting cultural dimension and neglected heritage was inherited and adopted.

To summing it all up, we describe further the most profound case out of the pool of studied cases. It embraces lots of contradictory vectors of actions and contains most of contextual issues of Russian conservation field, but in a very special way. Another aspect which makes this case so special is that we can take notice of and study more than 50 years of public engagement in its conservation which is unique itself because of certain historical reasons that make it impossible for most of Russian heritage properties. We refer to the case of Cultural and Historic Ensemble of the Solovetsky Islands, the heritage property of Outstanding Universal Value, enlisted into the World Heritage List in 1992.

Firstly, we have to point out, and it plays the key role in understanding the specific of the case: there is no local community at Solovetsky Islands in its classical notion. By local community we understand the residents who have been living in the area for generations and own the heritage. Of course, there are local residents who have been living at the islands for 70 years at the longest and for quite a long time had not recognized the heritage property as a valuable one. And there is a monastic community which was actually a traditional community for the area, but it was washed away in the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and was re-established only in the 1990s. We could note that both groups have very different aims and purposes concerning heritage.

What makes this case sufficient to the study is that we make an assumption that the Solovetsky complex, being a property of Outstanding Universal Value, even before its designation, had been a very powerful attraction. As such, at some points it acted as a local heritage property but on national level by engaging and attracting a very wide community from all over the country, which is may be considered as local community at that sense. This aspect is of fundamental importance for the case.



**Figure 3.** Photoproject "Motherland" by Danila Tkachenko (several one and two centuries old timber houses were burnt during the implementation of the art photo project. The artist claimed he had no idea of the valuableness of the houses). Soourse: <http://fotografie-in.berlin/kehrergalerie-danila-tkacenko-motherland/>



**Figure 4.** Tom Sawyer Fest. Samara 2018. Restoration in progress  
Source: <https://hinstein.ru/uploads/577417f0537cd.jpg>



The story began in late 60s, when a group of physics students decided to go as volunteers to the islands and took part in the restoration work. The Islands were the restricted area at that time. So, they had to overcome several administrative barriers and obstacles to get permission to visit the area. Since that time, three generations had volunteered to work at the restoration site there. Literally, children and grandchildren of those from the first group and those who came after them also participated in the conservation. It is also significant that being a part of the restoration team, the volunteers did not only restore the heritage property but also built the infrastructure of the island and maintained it. It made them a local community that at some point belonged more to the area than its residents. Some of them moved to the islands permanently afterwards. The professional restorers who supervised the conservation works also moved to the island and established the Research and Restoration Association which took charge of the conservation. This was generally the cause of designation of the whole property after all because it was done as delicate as possible and at the highest professional level.

One of the main founders of the Association was aware that the maintenance of heritage, its conservation and well-being depend on responsible local community that would be able to conserve and maintain it permanently and continually. Local residents started to pay closest attention to the work meanwhile, and slowly but surely began engaging in the conservation process.

The restorers selected keen and gifted teenagers and started to teach them how to work with the local heritage. After they finished school, the Association covered part of their costs for the higher education and later provided employment. Altogether, the Association brought up 21 skilled professionals. It was a very good start keeping in mind that population of the island was about 800 people including kids.

After being designated, the Solovetsky archipelago became very popular among tourists and its popularity only grows. It brings thousands of tourists to the islands and causes extensive and even vast development of tourist facilities, though very primitive ones. These events had been unfolding very fast and, in due course, and in the context of excluding local community from the decision-making process, led to the circumstances we are witnessing now. Not being fully inherited by the local community, the cultural property of the Solovetsky archipelago was fully understood as a large source for making money through cultural tourism at the same time.

In spite of its apparently robust monumental buildings, the property is in many ways exceedingly fragile. Almost every resident now can present in short terms the history of the archipelago, point out its highlights and show the way



**Figure 5.** Tom Sawyer Fest. Kaluga. 2018. House built in 1910. Before the restoration  
*Source: <https://storage/strelka.com/i/b81e0380-352a-424c-987d-5aba84cdc015/w/600>*



**Figure 6.** Tom Sawyer Fest. Kaluga. 2018. After the restoration  
*Source: <https://storage/strelka.com/i/b81e0380-352a-424c-987d-5aba84cdc015/w/600>*



**Figure 7.** Tom Sawyer Fest. Kaluga. 2018. The very building demolition (After having been restored by local volunteers in summer, the building was demolished by the owner's decision in autumn. What in effect is a very vivid illustration of disregard of public opinion)  
*Source: <https://storage/strelka.com/i/e3cd1d9b-293b-4f49-b954-48525f507293/w/825>*



**Figure 8.** Old Gubakha, 1940s  
*Source: <http://gubalib.permculture.ru>*



**Figure 9.** Old Gubakha, 2017  
Photo by Andrei Kolchin.  
Source: <https://nashural.ru/assets/uploads/g2KmJ19vY7o.jpg>

**Figure 10.** Students of Lomonosov MSU who volunteered to restoration work at Solovetsky islands. Photo by Vsevolod Tarasevich, 1960



**Figure 11.** Photo by Vsevolod Tarasevich, 1960



**Figure 12.** Roof conservation by volunteers. Photo by Vsevolod Tarasevich, 1960

to the main sights. However, very few of them feel personal responsibility for the state of conservation and maintenance of the monuments and the historical environment. The value of historical environment of the World Heritage cultural property as well as its contribution to its OUV is not fully understood either. That is why it still suffers from inappropriate and insensitive transformations, very often held by local residents.

When the legislation of restorations was changed, the Association was no longer capable to compete with large companies and lost the opportunity to work on the islands. Skilled professionals brought up by the Association are looking for employment elsewhere.

An efficient prolonged (continued for more than 50 years) initiative of creating responsible and involved local community, capable to maintain and even take part in managing the World Heritage property, was stilled by administrative obstacles and “one size fits for all” management system.

The contextual issues described above (not inherited heritage, local community washing out from the decision-making field) will cause completely consuming attitude of local residents towards cultural heritage. Only growing awareness of heritage value, responsibility for the future changes and decision making based on good understanding of the cultural heritage property, its significance and values, its attributes and its environment can lead to more responsible attitude of the local residents.

## **Incluziune vs. Excludere. Depășirea problemelor contextuale nedemocratice în integrarea comunităților locale pentru gestionarea și conservarea patrimoniului**

### **Rezumat**

Articolul prezintă retrospectiva diferitor inițiative de implicare a comunităților locale în conservarea și gestionarea patrimoniului înregistrate în Rusia în ultimele decenii. Acesta oferă analiza surselor, locațiilor și dezvoltărilor lor în lumina problemelor contextuale ale circumstanțelor sociale și politice contemporane și a influenței lor asupra câmpului de conservare. De asemenea, abordarea noastră prezintă rezumatul practicii de peste 50 de ani de implicare a comunității locale în conservarea proprietății WH „Ansamblul cultural și istoric al insulelor Solovetsky” din perioada anterioară desemnării sale până în prezent.

**Cuvinte cheie:** comunitate, dezvoltare, participare, echitate, Rusia.

**Anna Gaynutdinova**, Board of Russian ICOMOS  
National Committee (2016-2019), email: gauri.gan@gmail.com