

Integrating Heritage Conservation and Sustainable Development: The Role of Buffer Zones in Safeguarding the Tentative World Heritage Sites and Empowering Local Communities in India

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Abstract : The 2021 decision by the World Heritage Center to align buffer zones with the 2015 Strategy for Sustainable Development marks a significant advancement in the protection of cultural and natural heritage sites. Buffer zones play a critical role in preserving the outstanding universal value, authenticity, and integrity of heritage sites, shielding them from threats such as urbanization, industrialization, and tourism. The 2015 Strategy emphasizes the integration of culture and heritage into sustainable development policies, highlighting the importance of community participation, traditional knowledge, and effective management in the conservation of heritage sites. This paper examines the implications of this strategic alignment for tentative World Heritage Sites in India. It explores how buffer zones can serve as tools for sustainable tourism, economic growth, and environmental protection while also addressing the socio-economic needs of local communities. By adopting a people-centered approach, the study underscores the need for active community involvement in heritage conservation, recognizing local residents as long-term custodians of cultural heritage. The role of buffer zones in promoting sustainable livelihoods, enhancing resilience to environmental changes, and fostering a sense of belonging among communities is also discussed. The challenges associated with buffer zones, including restrictive boundaries, unclear legislative frameworks, and potential disconnection from sociocultural contexts, are critically analyzed. The paper advocates for a holistic and integrated approach to buffer zone management, ensuring that policies are not only theoretically sound but also practically feasible. It concludes by emphasizing the need for collaborative efforts among conservation professionals, local communities, and policymakers to achieve sustainable development goals that respect both the heritage site's integrity and the well-being of surrounding populations.

Keywords : buffer zones, India, local communities, urbanization, world heritage sites

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