

Corporate Responsibility for Cultural Heritage: Conservation, Sustainable Development, and Corporate Reputation

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At a time in which local, state, and national government budgets are being slashed, and cultural sites are in danger of being destroyed by development, mass tourism, and climate change, cultural sites struggle to procure and maintain the funding they desperately need. In order to meet their financial requirements, heritage managers and conservationists at all levels are rethinking possible sources of funding, often embracing nontraditional means such as crowdfunding or reaching out to private contributors. In her new book, *Corporate Responsibility for Cultural Heritage: Conservation, Sustainable Development, and Corporate Reputation*, Fiona Starr, curator of the World Heritage-listed Hyde Park Barracks and The Mint in Sydney, Australia (two historic properties managed by Sydney Living Museums), examines the relationship between private corporations and heritage conservation, a seemingly unlikely partnership that is often viewed with skepticism or outright disdain. She states that although the potential of private sector financing has been limited in the past, private corporate entities and heritage managers can find common ground based on shared value.

Central to Starr's thesis is the concept of corporate social responsibility, or CSR,

a growing trend in which multinational enterprises "seek to fulfill an increasing public expectation to behave as good corporate citizens by supporting worthy causes" (p. 15). While many may be suspicious of corporate altruism, this largesse is noteworthy, as the world's wealthiest companies give roughly \$12 billion in cash donations and \$10–15 billion in in-kind contributions annually, with approximately one in nine of these dollars spent according to socially responsible principles. Private corporations have funded projects in several key areas including poverty, education, equality, health, and environmental sustainability. While cultural heritage support has not historically been perceived as a priority by many in the private sector, often due to preconceptions that working with heritage sites is overly challenging and bureaucratic, Starr argues that conservation projects can be aligned with business goals including reputation enhancement and competitive positioning.

The book is organized into seven chapters and provides ample background information, case studies, and new research including two surveys performed by the author. Chapters 1 and 2 set the stage for Starr's arguments by explaining the current funding crisis experienced by heritage sites and defining the CSR paradigm and a framework for how the concept and movement can be aligned with the goals of heritage sites. Chapter 3, perhaps the book's most honest chapter, uses a wealth of examples to discuss the variety of ways in which private corporations have historically interacted with cultural heritage. The examples highlight a range

of issues and geopolitical settings with an overarching message that “the private sector can be as much a threat to conservation as it is an aid” (p. 43). Chapter 4 uses a case study from a project at Preah Khan, a temple complex within the Angkor Archaeological Park. This project involved a partnership between the World Monument’s Fund and American Express and is touted as a cultural heritage conservation project par excellence that provided benefits for both the physical conservation of the site and the local communities. Starr also summarizes the results of her visitor survey at the site, which addresses the public’s concerns with heritage sites partnering with the private sector. Chapter 5 summarizes the business case for CSR and concludes that cultural heritage-private sector partnerships create shared value that translates into social and commercial benefits for both parties. Chapter 6 presents the results of an international private sector survey targeting a variety of different enterprises. Results of the survey raise some surprising issues in terms of the private sector’s awareness and attitudes toward cultural heritage and the motivations of corporations for engaging in such support. Finally, Chapters 7 and 8 summarize the main points of the book and close with the takeaway message that problems with heritage funding can be addressed through CSR, but that in order for heritage projects to be attractive to the private sector, “project outcomes must be aligned with business strategy and corporate partnerships must be approached with a corporate agenda at the forefront of proposals” (p. 170).

In general, Starr makes convincing arguments for CSR managers to engage with cultural heritage sites. The book is a great point of departure for the topic and opens the door for many other case studies and future contributions. Although the book is centered on experiences at larger, internationally recognized heritage sites, the main arguments could, theoretically, be applied to smaller sites around the world. It paints broad strokes on the issue and makes logical arguments for why both private corporations and heritage sites should partner and find shared value within a CSR framework. Perhaps the book’s most valuable asset is the author’s international private sector survey, which investigates the “heritage partnership experiences, preferences, and attitudes of corporate responsibility representatives” (p. 113) from a variety of enterprises around the world. Results reveal a very valuable perspective on the issue that cultural resource specialists are typically unaware of. The book is very accessible and the principal points are presented and summarized within figures, tables, and text boxes. The book’s content will be most useful for corporate CSR representatives and heritage managers, but could also be used by graduate students, professors of heritage studies or public history, or anyone with an interest in the relationship between the private sector and built heritage conservation.

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