

**Submission by ICOMOS
REFLECTION WORKSHOP
ON THE FUTURE OF THE WORLD HERITAGE CONVENTION**

ICOMOS notes that the States Parties and Advisory Bodies have been invited to:

- reflect on the future of the Convention, recognising its successes and growing complexity;
- identify global strategic issues, key challenges, trends and opportunities; and,
- develop possible approaches, including synergies with other international instruments.

A Successful Convention

It is often said that the World Heritage Convention is an extremely successful one - perhaps the *most successful* of UNESCO's instruments and programs for conservation.

This judgement of 'success' is usually attributed to factors such as:

- the nearing milestone of the Convention's 40th anniversary
- the very large number of countries that have ratified the Convention and actively participate in its implementation
- the number of properties inscribed on the World Heritage List, which will soon reach 1000 (amounting in total to thousands of individual sites)
- the seemingly unwavering global enthusiasm to continue to build the World Heritage List, even in parts of the world which are already amply well represented in its inscriptions
- the visibility and recognition of the World Heritage 'brand' throughout the world as a marker of excellence, and of the desirability of destinations within the international tourism market.

These are all valid indicators of 'success' for the World Heritage Convention, but not necessarily the only ones that should be used. Thinking further about the Convention's achievements, ICOMOS suggests that there are additional ways of measuring the present and future 'success' of the World Heritage Convention (and there are undoubtedly more of these, or different ways of expressing them).

These form the basis of this submission – posed as questions that could be further explored by the workshop, illuminating relevant trends and challenges.

1. A Convention for conservation?
2. A Convention for co-operation and international assistance?
3. A Convention that celebrates and reflects the earth's natural and cultural diversity?
4. A Convention that adapts to and reflects diverse concepts of heritage?
5. A Convention that is workable, accessible and effective?
6. A Convention that provides relevant and helpful tools for conservation within the context of present and future global challenges?
7. A Convention that creates sustained benefits for local people - especially for associated communities, traditional owners and custodians?
8. A Convention that facilitates co-ordinated conservation efforts at the sub-national levels?
9. A Convention that works in coordination with other international instruments for culture and nature?
10. A Convention that establishes a recognisable, valuable and credible 'brand'?
11. A Convention of professionalism, which transcends national interest?
12. A Convention that is more than its Lists?

In considering the questions posed by the World Heritage Committee in this way, ICOMOS recognises that there are many practical aspects arising from the procedures and working methods of the World Heritage Committee, the Secretariat and the Advisory Bodies that are very pressing.

These include many specific issues - such as the growing size and the complexity of the workloads; the already acute and growing gap between the workload demands and the available financial and human resources; common misunderstandings about the delineation in the roles of the different structures established by the Convention (Committee, Secretariat, Advisory Bodies, States Parties); and so on.

While these are important and pressing matters, ICOMOS believes that the workshop should not be limited to a lengthy catalogue of such 'problems' and their procedural solutions. A wider and more visionary framework is suggested by the decision of the World Heritage Committee, and can incorporate both conceptual and practical dimensions.

1. A Convention for conservation?

This question recalls the primary purposes of the Convention, and the first 'C' of the Committee's strategic objectives.

It is the observation of ICOMOS that this primary purpose is sometimes overtaken by other short-term considerations, and that this can contribute to longer-term conservation and management problems (and added workload for the World Heritage system).

Staying true to the purpose of conservation requires long-term attention to protection, management and monitoring in order to ensure that the outstanding universal value of inscribed properties is not gradually eroded. It is not enough to ensure that these are adequate at the time of inscription only.

ICOMOS notes an increased tendency for States Parties to rush the submission of their nominations to the World Heritage List. This is a common underlying factor in recommendations for 'deferral' by ICOMOS, and the related pressures on the World Heritage Committee to make inscriptions before adequate management and protection arrangements are firmly in place.

ICOMOS also notes a relative decline in the attention given to monitoring and the State of Conservation reports during the sessions of the World Heritage Committee when compared with the inscriptions to the World Heritage List. While this is understandable in terms of the time and workload management challenges, the monitoring of conservation is a critical cornerstone of the workings of the Convention.

Given the huge volume of work involved in the State of Conservation process, how can this be used to support the conservation efforts of States Parties? How can these reports and the issues they identify be given sufficient attention? How can we ensure that sufficient levels of documentation are submitted with nomination files to provide a base line for future monitoring and evaluation of the state of conservation? How can State of Conservation reports be expanded to benefit a larger number of inscribed properties?

2. A Convention for co-operation and international assistance?

This question refers to one of the primary motivations behind the establishment of the World Heritage Convention.

There are many aspects that hinder the full realisation of this ideal, and warrant careful reflection, such as:

- limited resources available to the World Heritage Committee
- poor identification of specific assistance needs and relevant sources of assistance
- tensions between States Parties in relation to shared or contested cultural heritage
- narrow interpretation of 'international assistance' by focusing on the assistance that can be provided by the World Heritage Centre through the World Heritage fund or other donors

Could the World Heritage Committee do more to foster international cooperation? Do current international assistance efforts focus too much on the preparation of nomination materials and management plans, rather than ongoing conservation and management needs? How can the gap between the available resources and the needs of many States Parties be narrowed?

3. A Convention that celebrates and reflects the earth's natural and cultural diversity?

This question relates to the conceptual framework that underpins the operation of the Convention, and is closely related to the strategic objectives of credibility, capacity and communication.

Firstly, this question recalls the 1994 Global Strategy for a Balanced, Representative & Credible World Heritage List.

ICOMOS considers that the achievements of the Global Strategy are significant and have occurred through the combined efforts of the World Heritage Committee, the World Heritage Centre, the Advisory Bodies, States Parties, regional organisations, numerous NGOs and others. For example, ICOMOS commends the capacity building progress made through the Africa 2009 program, the various initiatives in the Caribbean, and the Pacific World Heritage Action Plan, despite the very modest financial and human resources available for these purposes.

However, it is well understood by everyone that there are continuing challenges, as described in the 'gap reports' prepared by ICOMOS and IUCN in the past 5 years.

'Imbalance' and under-representation of various geo-cultural regions, themes and historical periods persist, and may persist into the future, since the solutions to the perceived problems ultimately rely on the willingness of States Parties to submit viable nominations, and on the self-imposed restraint by other States Parties where property types are already well-represented. In some cases, the gaps are being amplified by the continued inscription of properties in already well represented geo-cultural regions, site types, cultural affinities and/or historical periods.

In considering the future of the Convention, it seems centrally important to understand the achievements of the Global Strategy, including an honest appraisal of what has worked well and what has failed to work. It might be necessary to refresh this Strategy, reconsidering its goals and sharpening its implementation.

4. A Convention that adapts to and reflects diverse concepts of heritage?

Like #3, this question relates to the conceptual framework that underpins the operation of the Convention, and is related to the credibility of the Convention.

It is the opinion of ICOMOS that the adaptability and evolution of the concepts used in the implementation of the World Heritage Convention is a strong factor contributing to its 'success' to date. In relation to cultural properties, this is illustrated by the progressive elaboration of the criteria; the recognition of cultural landscapes and cultural routes; and the influence of the 'Nara Document on Authenticity' (etc).

It is expected that greater future progress toward the goals of the Global Strategy will result in the need to respond to broadened concepts and approaches. In addition, ICOMOS acknowledges that continued work with IUCN is needed to fully realise the intention of the Convention to recognise a relationship of continuum between the Earth's natural and cultural heritage.

5. A Convention that is workable, accessible and effective?

This question relates to the ability of the working methods to support the purposes and intentions of the Convention.

As noted in the introductory comments to this submission, the challenges to this aspect of 'success' are many, and are reasonably well known.

As already noted, the growing number of properties inscribed on the World Heritage List brings increased work for the World Heritage Committee, the World Heritage Centre and the Advisory Bodies. Not only is the increase in work directly related to the overall number of properties inscribed, it is amplified by the haste to inscribe properties without adequate management and protection mechanisms in place.

The implications are obvious – the number, range and complexity of the activities to support the implementation of the Convention each year are increasing at a faster rate than the resources available. The situation of already over-stretched resources also prevents the Advisory Bodies and the World Heritage Centre doing other important activities, including those associated with capacity building strategies. Therefore the cost of this escalating ‘statutory’ workload is very high in terms of the sustainability of the system and the ability to work strategically.

ICOMOS believes that the working methods need to allow the work of the Convention to be accessible. Countries without the capacity to provide large delegations now struggle to review all the papers and the associated issues, and to contribute effectively and equally. The growth in the technical complexity and specialised language of the Convention also reduces the accessibility and inclusiveness of its work. These are not minor matters – they impact on the achievement of all of the Committee’s strategic objectives (the 5 ‘C’s).

Another aspect noted by ICOMOS is the desire by both States Parties and the Advisory Bodies to do more work together ‘upstream’ – that is, in advance of the formal submission of nominations for evaluation. While there seems to be consensus on the desirability of this shift, actually making it is harder, due to operational and resourcing issues.

Regarding the specific issues of finance, ICOMOS considers that the work started by the working group established by the World Heritage Committee in Quebec in 2008 could be broadened to deal more specifically with strategic questions, clarifying the extent of unfunded activity required of the Advisory Bodies, and so on. An analysis of both the demand and supply aspects of the financial situation would be desirable.

The Secretariat function of the World Heritage Centre could be strengthened and clarified. There are various issues concerning the tenure and knowledge base of the staff of the Centre, as well as better delineating the roles of the Centre and the Advisory Bodies. There are instances where there are perceptions of overlap in the roles of ICOMOS and the other Advisory Bodies and the World Heritage Centre. Continuing efforts to clarify these would benefit States Parties, and contribute to a more efficient use of limited resources.

ICOMOS notes that many of these issues were described in the recent ‘Management Audit’ of the World Heritage Centre, and could be progressed through the implementation of the associated recommendations.

6. A Convention that provides relevant and helpful tools for conservation within the context of present and future global challenges?

This question acknowledges that there are new and complex global pressures that may require new tools to support the purposes of the Convention. Many of these are canvassed in the document *Challenges for the Millennium*.

Some of these global pressures impacting on the conservation outcomes include:

- Climate change and its many impacts
- Rapid pace and scale of urban development, and the associated role of global capital
- Poverty and local under-development in some countries, which reduces the capacity for conservation
- Human rights issues associated with natural and cultural heritage
- The economic and social sustainability of the local context in which many World Heritage properties occur
- Rapid demographic change and the associated cultural shifts brought about by internal and international migrations
- Complex relationships between tourism, conservation and the well-being of local communities

The ‘Historic Urban Landscapes’ initiative well illustrates the need for the development of new or improved management and planning tools, and responds to a substantial and concerning growth in threats to the built heritage of the dynamic environments of the world’s cities and historic town centres. Another example of this need is the case of large and complex cultural landscapes, where determining the impacts of individual proposals for change on the outstanding universal value can be very difficult and contested.

Is there a need for more work by UNESCO on the role of heritage in society? The capacity to develop new or improved tools is challenged by the speed and scale of change, and the existing resource limitations. How can this be overcome? How can sharper tools be developed to assess impact of developments on the attributes of outstanding universal value? How can best practice on the management of change be shared?

7. A Convention that creates sustained benefits for local people - especially for associated communities, traditional owners and custodians?

This question acknowledges that there are *diverse outcomes* in the distribution of costs and benefits flowing from the inscription of World Heritage properties, and that this diversity can contribute variously to conservation, or conversely, create or amplify threats to the values of inscribed properties.

There are cases where inscription of properties on the World Heritage List has impacted negatively on local people, associated communities, traditional owners and custodians. The implementation of the 5th 'C' is a challenge since 'conservation' and 'community' go hand in hand.

For example, the trend to inscription of large and complex serial inscriptions and *extensive cultural landscapes* is challenging conventional management models in many ways, particularly in relation to the involvement of local communities.

8. A Convention that facilitates co-ordinated conservation efforts at the sub-national levels?

The question relates to the practical complexities of the implementation of the Convention.

While States Parties are required to ensure that the arrangements for protection and management are well co-ordinated within each country, ICOMOS observes a growing trend of frequent *disconnect between national and local authorities*, particularly in relation to planning and development approvals mechanisms.

A number of the issues associated with the current range of cultural properties subject to reactive monitoring, State of Conservation reporting, reinforced monitoring and/or inclusion in the List of World Heritage in Danger have arisen through development proposals and/or development approvals processes of local governments or specialised management authorities, such as ports. How can the Convention ensure that the planning systems in place continue to work together to protect the outstanding universal value of inscribed properties?

9. A Convention that works in co-ordination with other international instruments for culture and nature?

This question acknowledges that the *international context* in which the Convention operates has changed since its beginnings.

For cultural heritage, these changes have included the development by UNESCO of a number of Conventions, lists/registers, programs which have various areas of shared relevance with the operation of the World Heritage Convention. Notable amongst these are the Second Protocol of The Hague Convention and the 2003 Convention for Safeguarding Intangible Cultural Heritage, although there are numerous others.

While these necessarily operate differently and separately, they could certainly exist with a greater awareness of each other. Given the pressures on the resources available to implement the World Heritage Convention, how can these areas of additional coordination be realistically proposed?

10. A Convention that establishes a recognisable, valuable and credible 'brand'?

This question relates to the *credibility* of the Convention.

How can the success of the Convention be harnessed in order to sustain the values of properties and prevent the World Heritage 'brand' from being debased?

ICOMOS notes that a 'brand consultant' is being included in the planning for the Workshop on the Future of the World Heritage Convention, so it is possibly unnecessary to elaborate further on this point, other than to stress that the quality and recognisability of the 'brand' is not a separate question. Instead, this ultimately rests on the degree to which the work of the Convention can remain focused on conservation outcomes, and on the sustainability of properties within their local environmental, economic, social and cultural contexts.

11. A Convention of professionalism, which transcends national interest?

This question relates to the credibility of the Convention, and the goal of capacity building.

Professional expertise has always been emphasised as important to the effective operation of the Convention, as a counter to the potential for politicisation of its work, and as a means of transcending the national interests of States Parties in its outcomes.

Professional expertise is required in the work of the Advisory Bodies, States Parties, the World Heritage Centre, and importantly also through the membership of the World Heritage Committee itself. Each of these is important in terms of the quality of the decision-making.

As the nominations and conservation challenges become more complex, this is of continuing relevance, and the range of expertise needed to support the work of the World Heritage Committee has become very diverse.

12. A Convention that is more than its Lists?

This final point brings us back to the first – the primacy of conservation in the purposes of the Convention.

Hopefully this point is self-evident, but it still needs frequent reiteration. Among the most common and significant misconceptions that hinder the success of the World Heritage Convention are the assumptions that the Convention was created to establish its Lists, and that an inscription on the World Heritage List is the 'end' of the process.

ICOMOS recalls that Article 5 of the Convention requires States Parties to *adopt a general policy which aims to give the cultural and natural heritage a function in the life of the community...* To what extent has this been remembered and kept prominently in mind?

Could the implementation of the Convention do more to strengthen the national management and protection frameworks and institutions as a measure of its success in fostering better conservation? Is the 'trickle-down' effect – the relationship between the conservation of properties on the World Heritage List and other heritage properties in each country – being observed or monitored? Is it possible that the intensive management and protection of properties inscribed on the World Heritage List can even detrimentally affect the broader conservation outcomes nationally due to the allocation of limited resources, expertise and capacity to benefit only those few places of outstanding universal value?

The World Heritage List and its associated monitoring processes were intended as tools for global conservation and cooperation rather than ends in themselves. It is critically important that the tools for implementing the Convention should reflect this wider purpose.

ICOMOS, Paris
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