

18 April - International Day for Monuments and Sites
Theme 2012: World Heritage

**The 40th anniversary of the World Heritage Convention:
Recognising challenges for the future**

In 1982, in response to a proposal by ICOMOS, UNESCO designated 18 April as the 'International Day for Monuments and Sites'. Each year a theme is selected to help focus the celebration and promotion of cultural heritage across the world. The aim is to explore cultural heritage and encourage local communities and individuals to consider its importance to their lives, identities and communities. The theme selected for 2012 is World Heritage in celebration of the 40th Anniversary of the World Heritage Convention.

On 16 November 1972 the General Conference of UNESCO adopted the 'Convention Concerning the Protection of World Cultural and Natural Heritage'. This was the culmination of a process initiated several years before and, at the same time, the starting point of a new phase in the field of identification, protection and conservation of heritage. The Convention included both cultural and natural heritage in a single document, and consecrated the idea that there are properties whose significance and values exceed the boundaries of the country where they are located, and whose loss or deterioration would imply the impoverishment of the humanity as a whole. The recognition of a property to be of world heritage significance implies the awareness of a shared inheritance and common engagement for its conservation and legacy to future generations; in this sense, the Convention can be considered a tool to foster respect for cultural diversity, international cooperation and understanding, and peace among nations.

The World Heritage Convention is considered the most successful of all the UNESCO conventions: it has been ratified by 188 States Parties, and the World Heritage List currently includes 936 properties located in 153 States Parties, which comprise 725 cultural sites, 183 natural sites and 28 mixed sites. ICOMOS has played a prominent role in the implementation of the Convention; together with IUCN and ICCROM they constitute the three Advisory Bodies of the World Heritage Committee, the body formed by representatives from 21 States Parties in charge of implementing the Convention.

Although the best known aspect of the Convention is the World Heritage List, the document also addresses the entire cultural and natural heritage located in the territories of the States Parties; as set out in Article 5: 'each State Party shall endeavour, in so far as possible, and as appropriate for each country to adopt a general policy which aims to give the cultural and natural heritage a function in the life of the community and to integrate the protection of that heritage into comprehensive planning programmes'.

As defined in Article 11, the World Heritage List includes cultural, natural or mixed properties bearing outstanding universal value in terms of criteria adopted by the World Heritage Committee. ICOMOS is the Advisory Body in charge of evaluating nominations of cultural and mixed properties (in this case together with IUCN) and makes a recommendation to the World Heritage Committee, which has the final decision.

Once the properties are inscribed on the List, ICOMOS participates in the process of monitoring their state of conservation and management. ICOMOS also contributes with the creation of comparative and thematic studies regarding specific heritage categories in order to provide a context for evaluations; over the last years, ICOMOS had an active participation in the elaboration of tools and resource manuals such as 'Managing Disaster Risks for World Heritage', 'Preparing World Heritage Nominations' (2010) and 'Guidance on Heritage Impact Assessments for Cultural World Heritage Properties' (2011).

The text of the Convention has never been changed since its adoption; successive editions of the 'Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention' reflect the evolution of the concept of heritage, on criteria for demonstrating Outstanding Universal Value, integrity and authenticity, protection and management. The last edition of the Operational Guidelines was adopted in 2011.

The first properties were inscribed on the World Heritage List in 1978. Over the 1980s, it became evident that the List presented an imbalance in terms of geographical and thematic representation. It was also recognised that during the first years of implementation of the Convention the focus had been on 'monumental' heritage. Between 1987 and 1988 it was agreed to develop a global study that would also combine the temporal, thematic and cultural aspects. This provided the background for the Global Strategy for a Representative, Balanced and Credible World Heritage List, adopted by the World Heritage Committee in 1994, which marks the progression from a monumental vision of heritage to a much more people oriented, multifunctional and global vision of World Heritage. The same year, the 'Nara Document on Authenticity' recognised the specific nature of heritage values within each cultural context. Another important step for the evolution of the Convention was the 1998 Amsterdam meeting; to achieve a more comprehensive vision of heritage it was proposed to unify the criteria for demonstrating Outstanding Universal Value for cultural and natural properties. The condition of integrity, originally intended only for natural properties, was requested also for cultural and mixed sites.

On the occasion of the 30th anniversary of the Convention in 2002, the Committee adopted the 'Budapest Declaration on World Heritage', a declaration based on four key strategic objectives known as the 'four Cs': credibility, conservation, capacity building and communication. A fifth 'C' was added in 2007: communities, highlighting the importance of participation of local communities in preserving World Heritage.

For the fortieth anniversary of the Convention, States Parties and Advisory Bodies were invited to reflect on its future, to recognise its successes and growing complexity, identify global strategic issues, key challenges, trends and opportunities and develop possible approaches, including synergies with other international instruments. Challenges for the future were identified as follows:

- increasing complexity of nominations to the World Heritage List, including the emergence of transnational serial nominations, which require an adjustment of evaluation criteria and methods;
- the upcoming milestone of 1000 sites inscribed on the World Heritage List, which implies that there should be efforts undertaken to guarantee their proper conservation and management;
- global climate change and natural disasters that place heritage at risk;
- conservation challenges associated with increased development pressure or underdevelopment,
- increased tourism that may in some cases threaten the values of World Heritage properties.

At the same time, the stakeholders involved in heritage protection and conservation have notably broadened. Taking into account a more anthropological conception of heritage, local communities have become fundamental stakeholders in the process of identification, protection and management of heritage properties. The importance of the active participation of local communities in the World Heritage process is evident in the theme chosen by the World Heritage Committee for the 40th anniversary celebration of the Convention: 'World Heritage and sustainable development: the role of local communities'.

One of the main concerns from recent years is how the condition of World Heritage can contribute to sustainable development and improve the quality of life of local communities. The role of heritage as driver of development was explored by ICOMOS at the Scientific Symposium held in the framework of its 17th General Assembly in 2011. The 'Paris Declaration', the final document of the Symposium recognises that 'local people, civil society, and elected local and national officials will play a key role in the design and implementation of heritage as a driver of development, and, through raised awareness of heritage, they will have ownership of the development process'. The fortieth anniversary of the Convention constitutes an opportunity to reflect on how to link World Heritage, sustainable development and local communities.

National Committees are invited to participate in the celebration of the 18th of April and the 40th anniversary of the World Heritage Convention through the organisation of meetings, workshops, press conferences, or other events, for which key themes are suggested:

- the contribution of World Heritage to sustainable development and improving the quality of life of local communities
- the participation of local communities in the inscription and monitoring of properties on the World Heritage List
- the understanding and sharing of the Outstanding Universal Values of World Heritage properties by local communities
- techniques to foster or improve the awareness and participation of local communities
- equitable distribution of benefits among local communities
- the role of ICOMOS National Committees in the implementation of the World Heritage Convention.

We encourage National Committees to be part of this important celebration and kindly request to inform the International Secretariat on planned activities.

Alfredo Conti
Chair
ICOMOS World Heritage Working Group