

## President's Report to the GA in 2020

**Toshiyuki Kono**  
**President**

Dear ICOMOS members,

I hope that, despite the current difficult situations, you and your beloved people have been well since our last Advisory Committee and Annual General Assembly in Marrakesh.

The Board met 6 times virtually and twice physically after Marrakesh. The current Board introduced ZOOM in January 2018 and has organized virtual meetings since then. Therefore, the working method of the Board and its efficiency was not affected by the pandemic.

Each Board meeting has exceeded the scheduled time due to the overwhelming number of issues to be discussed and decided, but the Board has collegially made decisions by consensus, even in difficult issues.

The 13 task teams of the Board, which have been working since 2018, made their best possible effort to lead the organization toward better directions. They are:

- National Committees, World Heritage and monitoring
- Monitoring of National and International Scientific Committees
- Cultural Diversity and Multilingualism
- Communications
- Membership
- Finance
- Memorandums of Understanding
- Rules of Procedure and Handbook
- International Day for Monuments and Sites
- Reconstruction and Recovery
- Google Arts and Culture
- Heritage@Risk Observatory
- World Heritage Business

I am pleased to inform you that a new task team on COVID-19 was approved at the board meeting in May, 2020. This task team consists of 13 board members and Advisory Committee officers, assisted by 5 emerging professionals. Those who attended the Webinar on COVID-19 organized by ADCOM on October 12, 2020 should remember the excellent presentation of this team.

As you may recall, in Marrakesh, I offered the model of an ecosystem as a tool to revisit and evaluate the activities of ICOMOS, taking the specificities of ICOMOS as a non-profit NGO, with individual members at the heart of its being. In a sound ecosystem, each component functions and grows properly, and the inter-relationships among the components creates additional values and strengthens the system. Commonly shared goals connect various people and institutions. Openness, diversity and trust are keys to a successful ecosystem.

Needless to say, each National Committee and International Scientific Committee is key in this context. Annual meetings and reports of NCs and ISCs are a crucial indicator of the need for a stronger collaboration among National Committees, International Scientific Committees and members. We have amongst us, globally, a wealth of expertise and wide networks in the heritage community. This social capital is one of the most important assets our voluntary organization has. We should capitalize on this to cross-pollinate ideas, share synergistic effects and experiences, and facilitate information exchange to the outside.

ICOMOS has been working towards a better ecosystem through various initiatives.

First is the Emerging Professionals Working Group (EPWG). It was created in the summer of 2017. Its first physical meeting was held in Delhi. At that time, even the name of the Working Group was not fixed. Most of the participants in the General Assembly seemed to be curious about the group of young colleagues, but the idea to form a group of younger colleagues beyond the borders of National Committees and International Scientific Committees was not familiar with many senior members.

When you hear about "EP" (emerging professionals) now, many of you not only understand what it means, but also recall the names and faces of some colleagues from this group. Many of you remember that the members of the Emerging Professional Working Group successfully supported and organized a series of

Webinars during the last six months. I understand that the EPWG is entering a new stage and emerging as a pool of talent. The EPWG is not only generational additions, but also enables intergenerational exchanges in the ecosystem.

To be noted however is that this group or these talents did not emerge automatically. They needed encouragement and various support. In this context, I am proud of the fact that I hosted and attended the meetings of the EPWG more than 40 times during the last 3 years. I do hope that ICOMOS will find more talents from this group. For that purpose, ICOMOS should provide them with continuous support.

There are still many things to do for ICOMOS to grow into an optimal ecosystem: more National Committees should be established in certain regions to organize heritage experts; broader collaboration should happen, which may eliminate the many silos in ICOMOS and the associated criticisms. The Advisory Committee, coupled with the Annual General Assembly, besides the General Assembly, is a unique forum for synergy amongst us all, and can be the birthplace of collaboration through joint projects.

In this context, I welcome the Triennial Scientific Plan for 2021-2023 by the Scientific Council. This Triennial Plan invites to focus on developing ICOMOS climate change action and collaborations and integrate it within the ICOMOS Work Programme under Article 9 of the ICOMOS Statutes. I look forward to innovative ideas and projects in this framework. This is a good example, which represents a feature of a sound ecosystem, i.e. each component functions and grows properly, and the inter-relationships among the components creates additional values and strengthens the system. I thank Mr. Andrew Potts, who has led the Climate Change and Heritage Working Group, for his great contribution to this development, and wish him to continue to play a central role in this Triennial Plan.

The ecosystem model would apply not only to evaluation of the existing internal components, but also to reactions to factors outside of ICOMOS. Institutions are greatly affected by surrounding circumstances. A sound ecosystem could properly react to such external factors. Needless to say, the most impactful external factor is the COVID-19 pandemic.

Cultural heritage is a cornerstone of human, social and economic recovery, but as the statement jointly issued by the president of the ADCOM and myself indicated, there are too many uncertainties in the world in terms of the pandemic. Hence, ICOMOS should take a mid- or long-term approach.

Hence, the task team on COVID-19 conducted a first-phase survey on COVID-19 and its impact on heritage. The preliminary outcome was reported at the Webinar on October 12, 2020. The report was highly praised at the event and will be available on the ICOMOS website before the General Assembly in December 2020.

In terms of the World Heritage, as I reported last year, in Baku, the World Heritage Committee decided to retain "the status-quo regarding the involvement of additional advisory services" (43COM12A para 13). ICOMOS is still a credible partner for the State Parties. ICOMOS has to maintain its expertise with the highest quality in the field of the World Heritage. In this regard, the World Heritage Atelier was created under my initiative in 2019 to nurture more World heritage advisors. I am pleased to inform you that six promising people were selected and have been mentored. They will debut as WH-advisors soon. I do hope that they share their experiences with more people, and that a second call would be organized soon, for ICOMOS to reinforce its status in the World Heritage system.

As the most recent news, I would like to mention the Memorandum of Understanding with the ICOMOS International Conservation Center – Xi'an (IICC). This entity was founded in Xi'an, in 2006, for which the then-president, Michael Petzet took a lead. This is the only Center with the name of ICOMOS, but there has been no contractual arrangement between ICOMOS and this entity in Xi'an since its foundation. I am pleased to inform you that I, on behalf of ICOMOS, signed the Memorandum of Understanding with the Municipality of Xi'an very recently, in order to give a legal framework to the relationship with the IICC and its activities. Legal uncertainty due to the lack of Memorandum of Understanding is now solved. I hope the IICC will closely work with ICOMOS and flourish.

Last, but not least, I thank all members of ICOMOS for their support for me during the last three years. It was an extremely rich and rewarding experience.