

## Report by the President of ICOMOS

Dear ICOMOS members,

Time flies! Ten months have already passed since our last ADCOM/AGA in Buenos Aires! I hope those months were fruitful for you.

Following the ADCOM/ AGA in Buenos Aires, I have tried to figure out a model that might succinctly represent who we are and what we need. Such a model would be a helpful tool for us to revisit and evaluate our activities. Taking into account the specificities of ICOMOS as a non-profit NGO, with individual members at the heart of its being, I propose the model of an ecosystem.

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. Here, neither top-down approach nor one-size-fits-all model works.

If we apply this model to ICOMOS, it is clear that each National Committee and International Scientific Committee is key. Annual meetings and reports of NCs and ISCs are a crucial indicator of the need for a stronger collaboration among NCs, ISCs 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 organisation has. We should capitalize on this to cross-pollinate ideas, share synergistic effects and experiences, and facilitate information exchange to the outside. To enhance this position, we should clarify the role and functions of trust as a widely recognized social capital, and identify costs caused by the lack of trust.

There are still many things to do for ICOMOS to grow into an optimal ecosystem: more NCs should be established in certain regions to organise heritage experts; broader collaboration should happen, which may eliminate the many silos in ICOMOS and the associated criticisms. ADCOM/AGA, besides the GA, is a unique forum for synergy amongst us all, and can be the birthplace of collaboration through joint projects. Have we effectively used this unique opportunity to maximize our benefits?

We have been working towards a better ecosystem through various initiatives. First is the creation of the Emerging Professionals Working Group. Only two years old, the group has 90 EP representatives appointed by NCs and ISCs. Since generational additions are crucial for a healthy ecosystem, this is a great collaborative achievement. The second is assisting in the birth of new NCs, such as with Austria, Lebanon and Montenegro. I am happy to report that the latter two organise conferences in their respective regions, and that ICOMOS Austria has quickly established a firm position in its country.

I'd like to point out another example of collaboration. The trigger was the Cathedral of Notre Dame, Paris. While ICOMOS has been conducting a project related to reconstruction of cultural heritage since 2015 (<https://www.icomos.org/en/focus/rEconstruction>), the disaster on April 15, 2019, led to exchanges of various ideas and views, not only on the future of the Cathedral, but also on key issues such as authenticity, risk-preparedness, wood and forest, etc. Some ISCs such as CIVVIH and ICORP have scheduled relevant symposia or actions which are great examples of active components in the ecosystem. We need more platforms to include as many components - ISCs, NCs, and WGs - as possible.

The Board also discussed possible frameworks where more components of the ecosystem could collaborate. One example of such an inclusive platform could be an exhibition on the conservation history of the Cathedral and comparative global analysis of cases in post-traumatic context. I started to raise funds and it seems possible for the exhibition to travel to some countries. Since the special law for the restoration of the Notre Dame is enacted and in force since July 2019, we should be able to move ahead. I will report more about it in my next letter.

The ecosystem model would apply not only to evaluation of the existing internal components, but also to reactions to factors outside of ICOMOS. Institutions do not exist in a vacuum. They are greatly affected by surrounding circumstances. A sound ecosystem could properly react to such external factors. In this context, I refer to the most recent decision by the World Heritage Committee (WHC) in Baku this year.

As you may recall, as I reported to you in my letter in January, ICOMOS's position as World Heritage advisor was threatened. The WHC extended the mandate of its ad hoc WG, *inter alia* "to discuss modalities for the possible use of advisory services of other entities" (42COM12A). The ad hoc WG consists of the Member States of the WHC and two additional State Parties from each UNESCO electoral group. They met every month at UNESCO HQ under the chairmanship of a delegate of Azerbaijan. In addition, an expert meeting to discuss a possible reform of the evaluation process was hosted in Tunis (January 23-25, 2019) and sponsored by Australia. The three Advisory Bodies were invited to these meetings. Many options were proposed and discussed by the ad hoc WG between January 2019 and June 2019. Frankly, it was not a smooth path. Up to a month before the WHC, for instance, it was not clear whether the ad hoc WG would recommend the use of additional advisory bodies or not. On another occasion, an ambassador suggested that recommendations from ICOMOS should be reviewed and had already started assessing how many days this reviewing would take.

ICOMOS, represented by Marie-Laure Lavenir, Director General of ICOMOS International Secretariat, and myself, have been nurturing collaborative relationships with two other advisory bodies, IUCN and ICCROM who were in the same position. It could be seen as a step forward to contribute to the heritage community as a vital ecosystem. We had many healthy dialogues with the members of the ad hoc WG and tried to be as proactive as possible. On top of that, I presented a lot of data on our practice, which include the average number of pages of one nomination dossier, the number of desk reviewers, geographical diversity, acceptance ratio etc., and shared them with the ad hoc WG.

I am happy to report that in Baku, the WHC decided to retain "the status-quo regarding the involvement of additional advisory services" (43COM12A para 13). This short sentence does not reflect the efforts and time spent by ICOMOS in the last few years, but I want to stress that in the discussions of the ad hoc WG throughout this process, it appears that ICOMOS is still a credible partner for the State Parties. I also confirm that such a trust mainly stems from dialogue with the State Parties, which ICOMOS has initiated and improved since 2015. I want to thank all the people who contribute to ICOMOS WH mandate, including the Secretariat in Paris, the WH advisors, desk reviewers and mission experts. In this regard, ICOMOS demonstrated its capacity to cope with external circumstances, and symbolizes a functioning ecosystem.

This said, this is still the beginning of a journey to seek a better evaluation system. The WHC endorsed the idea to introduce a new compulsory step of "preliminary assessment" before submitting a nomination dossier (43COM12A para.8 and 9). Its modalities will be discussed and eventually adopted in 2020 (para 12), followed by a trial period of several years. Since ICOMOS is expected to play an important role in this new phase, it must strengthen its capacity. To meet this need, we created the World Heritage Atelier, and called for applications in July 2019. This is the newest element in our ecosystem.

Last, but not least, if you come to Marrakesh, I look forward to a good dialogue with you. However, if I do not see you in person there, I would like to send my best regards. In any case, I wish that the last quarter of the year 2019 will be a fruitful time for you.

Yours,

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President of ICOMOS