

Expanding Resources and Responsibility for Conserving The World's Cultural Sites and Monuments

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Purpose

- * To describe the rationale for broadening the public and private resource base for protecting and conserving the world's cultural sites and monuments;

To relate examples of economic gains through application of new technological and institutional resources, and collaborative approaches to conservation;

- * To stimulate thought and discussion among ICOMOS members on these topics.

The world's cultural sites and monuments are threatened during armed conflict by looting and destruction, and in peacetime, they are under siege as a result of construction, farming, pillaging, mis-use, natural disasters, environmental pollution and neglect. As national governments and private organizations face increasing financial strains, funds available for conservation of cultural property are bound to be curtailed. Hence, we are challenged to seek new resources and collaborative approaches for the cause.

How can this be accomplished? First, by broadening the base of support for conservation to include allied interest groups. Second, by pooling resources – public and private – on an intra-national, bilateral and multilateral scale. Third, by adding concern for cultural property conservation and maintenance to the scope of existing programs designed for other but complementary purposes. Fourth, by applying existing technologies to the task. And fifth, by enhancing public awareness of the challenge and by encouraging a concern for conservation at local, national and international levels.

The rationale for broadening the base of support for conservation can be found in the two major international accords for the protection of the world's cultural sites and monuments: the *Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict* signed at the Hague in 1954, and the 1972 *Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage* (the World Heritage Convention). While acknowledging the principle of national sovereignty, both conventions are predicated on the principle that responsibility for protecting outstanding examples of cultural heritage is an international concern, calling for cooperative action.

Moreover, the 1954, Hague Convention is part of international humanitarian law, based on the premise that it is a human right to gain knowledge of the past through access to its material remains. The 1972 World Heritage Convention is basically an environmental treaty, with its concern for preservation of natural, cultural and "mixed" sites. Therefore, the powerful, effective human rights and environmental groups are potential allies of cultural heritage preservationists.

The concept of international responsibility inherent in the two conventions implies sharing of resources through bilateral and multilateral channels. This includes technical and financial assistance from both public and private sources. There are many examples of such assistance, and there is the possibility for greatly expanded cooperative ventures.

Particularly promising is the prospect of assistance to developing countries in creating computerized inventories of

cultural property using simple software programs developed for personal computers. Both of the international conventions require national governments to create such inventories, so there is considerable work to be done in this area. Shared documentation would strengthen the global framework for recognition and conservation of cultural sites and monuments. There are other, equally logical applications of current technology to the task of identifying, managing and conserving cultural property.

Integrating concern for cultural sites and monuments into existing bilateral and multilateral aid programs is another means of securing enhanced protection at little or no additional cost. An example is the pre-disaster planning and mitigation assistance available to developing countries. Expanding the list of concerns to include cultural property and objects would both emphasize their importance, and aid in protection and restoration in the event of natural disaster. A second example is mutual assistance in development and management of cultural sites for tourism as part of bilateral and multilateral aid

programs, in recognition of the potential for job creation, enterprise development and hard currency generation.

Implicit expanding and enhancing protection of cultural property is the need to nurture the responsibility for vigilance and care at local, national and international levels. Public education and media awareness are essential elements, and in these endeavors, there is great potential for assistance and collaborative effort.

Specific examples of on-going projects and possibilities will be presented from results of the authors work on projects designed to mobilize people private resources in the United States for the purpose of aiding in protecting and conserving the world's outstanding cultural sites and monuments. ICOMOS members in attendance will be invited to comment and to add suggestions for attracting new resources and broadening the responsibility for preserving and appreciating the international cultural patrimony in an era of economic retrenchment and increasing threats.