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Modern Built Heritage as World Heritage



*White City
of Tel Aviv, 1920s*

The *Convention concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage*, the so-called “World Heritage Convention”, was adopted by the General Conference of UNESCO at Nairobi in November 1972. The Convention resulted from a long process that had its roots in the international developments since the creation of UNESCO in 1945. It also followed the *Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict*, adopted at The Hague in 1954 as a consequence of the massive destruction of cultural heritage in the Second World War. In this 1954 Convention, “cultural property” included: “movable or immovable property of great importance to the cultural heritage of every people, such as monuments of architecture, art or history, whether religious or secular; archaeological sites; groups of buildings which, as a whole, are of historical or artistic interest; works of art; manuscripts, books and other objects of artistic, historical or archaeological interest; as well as scientific collections” etc. In the case of the World Heritage Convention, nearly 20 years later, the wording was changed to “cultural heritage”, though still referred to “monuments, groups of buildings and sites”, but not including collections, archives or museums as in 1954.

According to the World Heritage Convention, in order to be eligible to the World Heritage List, “monuments” and “groups of buildings” are required to have *outstanding universal value* from the point of view of history, art or science, and “sites” from the historical, aesthetic, ethnological or anthropological point of view. The World Heritage Convention also refers to natural heritage, which was joined with cultural heritage as a result of agreements between UNESCO and the organizers of the United Na-

tions Conference on the Human Environment at Stockholm in June 1972. The definitions, particularly of the cultural heritage, have since been specified in the *Operational Guidelines on the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention* (see 2005 edition), elaborating especially the definition of “groups of buildings” to include: historic towns, and of the “sites” to include: cultural landscapes and cultural routes.

The definition of “outstanding universal value” has been subject to some debate ever since the adoption of the Convention. In the 2005 edition of the Operational Guidelines this is now referred to as being: ‘exceptional’, exceeding ‘national boundaries’, and being of ‘common importance for all humanity’. It is obvious that the notion of “outstanding universal value” is a modern concept, and the justification needs to be in some way “constructed”. In this regard, it may be helpful to refer to the definition provided in the report of the World Heritage strategy meeting in Amsterdam in 1998:

*“The requirement of outstanding universal value characterising cultural and natural heritage should be interpreted as an **outstanding response to issues of universal nature** common to or addressed by all human cultures. In relation to natural heritage, such issues are seen in bio-geographical diversity; in relation to culture in human creativity and resulting cultural diversity.”*
(v. Droste, et al. 1998, p. 221)

So, this value should be referred to issues or themes that are of universal nature and common to all humanity, while the heritage itself is defined as a response characterised by its creative diversity. This is clearly also indicated in



Chandigarh, India

the UNESCO *Declaration of the cultural diversity* where heritage is again seen as a result of the human **creative process**:

*“Culture takes diverse forms across time and space. This diversity is embodied in the **uniqueness and plurality of the identities** of the groups and societies making up humankind.” (art. 1) ... “Creation draws on the roots of cultural tradition, but flourishes in contact with other cultures. For this reason, heritage in all its forms must be preserved, enhanced and handed on to future generations as a record of human experience and aspirations, so as to **foster creativity in all its diversity and to inspire genuine dialogue among cultures.**” (art. 7)*

The Operational Guidelines elaborate on the criteria required for the definition of the outstanding universal value of the nominated property. There were initially six criteria for cultural properties and four for natural. Resulting from the recommendation of the 1998 expert meeting at Amsterdam, the World Heritage Committee decided to join these criteria, forming a list of ten, published in the 2005 edition of the Operational Guidelines. In essence, the cultural criteria refer to a property as a representation of: (i) a masterpiece of human creativity, (ii) important exchange of values (influences), (iii) a unique or exceptional testimony to a tradition or civilization, (iv) an outstanding example of a type of building, ensemble or landscape, (v) an outstanding example of a traditional human settlement or land-use, (vi) direct or tangible association with traditions, ideas or beliefs. The criteria from (vii) to (x) refer to natural heritage. However, it is noted that criterion (vii) refers to a property of “exceptional natural beauty and aesthetic importance”, which in fact is also basically a cultural criterion though referred to natural phenomena or areas. The justification of inscription generally only requires that the property satisfies one of these criteria. However, the nominated cultural property also needs to respond to the requirement of authenticity and integrity, as well as having appropriate management system and plans.

These criteria must apply to all kinds of cultural heritage, including the Palaeolithic archaeological sites, the monuments of Antiquity, the medieval historic towns, as well as to monuments, groups of buildings or sites representing our recent heritage. It can be noted, however, that certain regions and certain types of buildings or ensembles are more easily justifiable to consider for inscription on the World Heritage List because they represent a type of heritage that has long been recognized for values, as well as being well protected and managed. In fact, most cultural properties so far inscribed on the World Heritage List represent European history of architecture, and especially the Classical Antiquity, the Middle Ages and the Renaissance. There are relatively fewer properties inscribed from other world regions, and especially properties that represent the 19th and 20th centuries.

What is intended by “modern heritage” can of course be flexible. There are various international initiatives to promote the conservation of certain types of heritage. Important amongst these is DoCoMoMo (International Working Party for Documentation and Conservation of buildings, sites and neighbourhoods of the Modern Movement). An initiative has been launched in the Asian countries, resulting in “modern Asian Architecture Network” (mAAN), which has emphasised the particular character of the development of the Modern Movement in the Asian region. In recent years, ICOMOS has given birth to various initiatives, including the International Scientific Committee on 20th-Century Heritage. At the same time, considering that the modern built heritage can have a variety of different forms, it is obvious that many other ICOMOS initiatives may well be relevant, such as those related to historic towns and villages (CIVVIH), historic structures (ISCARSAH) or the recent Committee on Theory and Philosophy of Conservation and Restoration (THEORY). These committees are obviously an indication of the interest of professionals to define modern structures as heritage and to encourage national legislators and relevant authorities to provide the necessary protection.

The built heritage representing the 20th century, so far inscribed on the World Heritage List, ranges from single properties, such as the Rietveld-Schröder House in Utrecht, “Bauhaus and its sites in Weimar and Dessau” by Walter Gropius, and “Luis Barragán House and Studio” in Mexico City, to larger areas, such as Brasilia in Brazil, “The White City of Tel Aviv”, the University Campus in Caracas. There is also the cemetery of “Skogskyrkogården” in Stockholm representing a landscape garden, and there are technical monuments, such as Völklingen Ironworks in Germany and the hydraulic boat lifts on the Canal du Centre in Belgium.

The Bauhaus buildings (inscribed in 1996) were justified on the basis of criteria (ii), (iv) and (vi), referring to the foundation of the International Modern Movement and the seminal influence of these particular buildings on this movement. The Rietveld-Schröder House (inscribed in 2000) was justified on the basis of criteria (i)

and (ii) referring to it as an icon of the Modern Movement in architecture and as an outstanding expression of human creative genius in its purity of ideas and concepts as developed by the De Stijl movement. In fact, having been built in 1924, this building anticipated the Bauhaus, which dates three years later. ICOMOS had proposed criterion (vi) for the Rietveld-Schröder House, considering that its significance was particularly as an icon and as an idea, though also as a significant work of art. However, the World Heritage Committee decided not to accept this criterion, which is often subject to debate and should normally be accompanied by other criteria.

The 2004 inscription of Luis Barragán's House and Studio, on the basis of criteria (i) and (ii), was proposed by the Mexican authorities due to the importance of its architect in the innovative interpretation of the Modern Movement, integrating traditional, philosophical and artistic currents into a new synthesis within the regional context of Latin America. His work has also had great importance internationally, but unfortunately many of Barragán's landscape projects have since been altered and have thus lost the original integrity of their design.

The White City of Tel Aviv was inscribed in 2003 on the basis of criteria (ii) and (iv). It was built mainly in the 1930s, when many Jewish architects emigrated from Nazi Germany to the promised land in the Palestine Territories. They brought with them the ideas and the European experience of the Modern Movement, adapting them to the particular cultural and geographic context of the Near East.

The city of Brasilia, the new capital of Brazil, was created in the centre of the country in 1956. This project in its way represents the realization of a modern utopia, based on an overall traffic scheme, designed by Luico Costa. The public buildings were designed by architect Oscar Niemeyer as real works of art, which together form the focal point of the Capitol area of the city. The city was inscribed in 1987 on the basis of criteria (i) and (iv). It should be noted, however, that utopias are difficult to build in reality. Also here, there are enormous problems of maintenance, as well as of habitability and even of traffic, considering that the city was never designed for a pedestrian.

The Ciudad Universitaria de Caracas was built to the design of the architect Carlos Raúl Villanueva during the time when many countries were struggling with the Second World War, between 1940 and 1960. It thus became another regional implementation of the ideas of the Modern Movement in a larger area, this time in Latin America. The campus was inscribed on the World Heritage List in 2000 on the basis of criteria (i) and (iv). The overall design of the university was in the hands of a single architect, which gave it particular coherence. At the same time, the university was able to benefit from the contribution of numerous distinguished artists, thus integrating the design with first-class works of art, such as A. Calder, F. Léger, J. Arp, and V. Vasarely.

The Stockholm cemetery, Skogskyrkogården, was created in 1917–1920 by the Swedish architects Asplund and Lewerentz. The design brings together vegetation and architectural elements, taking advantage of irregularities in the site. As a result, the young designers were able to create a landscape that has had great influence in many countries. It was inscribed in 1994 on the basis of criteria (ii) and (iv).

An aspect of great importance to the modern world is certainly related to the development of science and technology. In fact, there are a few technical monuments on the World Heritage List. The Völklingen Ironworks were inscribed in 1994, referring to criteria (ii) and (iv). These ironworks cover some 6 ha, dominating the town of Völklingen. They are considered the only intact example in Western Europe and North America of an integrated ironworks built and equipped in the 19th and 20th centuries. Another example are the Four Lifts on the Canal du Centre and their Environs, La Louvière and Le Roeulx in Hainault, Belgium, inscribed in 1998 on criteria (iii) and (iv). The site has eight hydraulic boat lifts dating to the end of the 19th century, and they are still in working condition.

The above examples have been mainly focused on the Modern Movement in architecture, which developed particularly from the 1920s. Nevertheless, what we consider our modern heritage must not be limited to this period or this type of architecture. In fact, we should also name artists such as Antonio Gaudi and Victor Horta, who were important in developing the ideas of Art Nouveau, which became an influential movement through the first decades of the 20th century finding different regional expressions in various countries. We can also go further back, as well as explore what different regional expressions can be found in Africa, Asia, Australia or America. There may be many reasons why modern heritage is not better represented. In fact, it is often difficult to fully appreciate and identify for protection works of the previous generation. The emphasis on functionality and the fast aging systems of production and lesser durability may well be part of the reasons.

Nevertheless, it is worth challenging ourselves to recognize our recent heritage not only for the balance of our appreciation of different cultures, but also in order to generate self-esteem and pride in this period of globalization when higher values tend to be forgotten and ignored. The World Heritage Centre at UNESCO has taken an active role in the promotion of consciousness of recent heritage. There have already been several expert meetings on this subject, e.g. at Chandigarh in India, of which the contributions have already been published (*Identification and Documentation of Modern Heritage*, 2003). There is still, however, a long way to go both in understanding what is our recent heritage, and secondly in providing the necessary means for its protection and appropriate conservation management.