

The Role of the ICOMOS in Cultural Tourism at World Heritage Sites

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This paper addresses the topic under the following headings:

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The World Heritage Convention and the Operational Guidelines

As one of the outcomes of the general conference of UNESCO held in 1970 UNESCO and IUCN undertook exercises in drafting conventions for the protection of the World's Cultural and Natural Heritages respectively. As a result of these efforts the UNESCO General Conference 1972 adopted the Convention known as the "Convention for the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage" and, following its adoption by the requisite number of States Parties,¹ the first General Assembly of States Parties was held in November 1976. At this Assembly the first World Heritage Committee, consisting of 21 States, was elected.

Article 1 of the Convention defines cultural heritage as follows:

"For the purposes of this Convention, the following shall be considered as "cultural heritage":

monuments: architectural works, works of monumental sculpture and painting, elements or structures of an archaeological nature, inscriptions, cave dwellings and combinations of features, which are of outstanding universal value from the point of view of history, art or science;

groups of buildings: groups of separate or connected buildings which, because of their architecture, their homogeneity or their place in the landscape, are of outstanding universal value from the point of view of history, art or science;

sites: works of man or the combined works of nature and of man, and areas including archaeological sites which are of outstanding universal value from the historical, aesthetic, ethnological or anthropological points of view."

Articles 4, 5, 6 and 7 go on to deal with the national and international protection of the cultural and natural heritage.

Article 4 ensures that each State Party to the Convention recognises its duty to ensure the "identification, protection, conservation, presentation and transmission to future generations" of the cultural heritage.

Article 5 is important for the purposes of this paper and so it is set out in full:

1. State Parties is the term used in the convention for National Governments which are signatories to the convention.

“To ensure that effective and active measures are taken for the protection, conservation and presentation of the cultural and natural heritage situated on its territory, each State Party to this Convention shall endeavour, in so far as possible, and as appropriate for each country:

- (a) 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;
- (b) to set up within its territories, where such services do not exist, one or more services for the protection, conservation and presentation of the cultural and natural heritage with an appropriate staff and possessing the means to discharge their functions;
- (c) to develop scientific and technical studies and research and to work out such operating methods as will make the State capable of counteracting the dangers that threaten its cultural or natural heritage;
- (d) to take the appropriate legal, scientific, technical, administrative and financial measures necessary for the identification, protection, conservation, presentation and rehabilitation of this heritage; and
- (e) to foster the establishment or development of national or regional centres for training in the protection, conservation and presentation of the cultural and natural heritage and to encourage scientific research in this field.”

Articles 6 and 7 recognise the individual sovereignty of the States Parties, provide for international cooperation and require each State Party not to take any deliberate measures which might damage, directly or indirectly, the cultural and natural heritage.

The other major document prepared by the World Heritage Committee is that known as the Operational Guidelines. These Guidelines were first prepared in 1977 and have been revised frequently since then, last in December 1992.

Amongst many other things the Operational Guidelines set out the criteria for selecting cultural and natural places which are to be included in the World Heritage List. The criteria for cultural heritage places include authenticity and management requirements.

These management requirements as at December 1992 are as follows:

“Paragraph 24(b)

- (i) meet the test of authenticity in design, material, workmanship or setting and in the case of cultural landscapes their distinctive character and components (the Committee stressed that reconstruction is only acceptable if it is carried out on the basis of complete and detailed documentation on the original and to no extent on conjecture).
- (ii) have adequate legal and/or traditional protection and management mechanisms to ensure the conservation of the nominated cultural property or cultural landscapes. The existence of protective legislation at the national, provincial or municipal level or well-established traditional protection and/or adequate management mechanisms is therefore essential and must be stated clearly on the nomination form. Assurances of the effective implementation of these laws and/or management mechanisms are also expected. Furthermore, in order to preserve the integrity of cultural sites, particularly those open to large numbers of visitors, the State Party concerned should be able to

provide evidence of suitable administrative arrangements to cover the management of the property, its conservation and its accessibility to the public.

The issue which is apparent from this paragraph is that there are requirements, brief but of a comprehensive nature, which must be complied within the preparation of any nomination to the World Heritage List and which must be taken into account in any consideration of cultural tourism at a World Heritage Site.

The Brussels Charter

ICOMOS, in 1976, adopted a Charter of Cultural Tourism, which has become known as the Brussels Charter.

ICOMOS stated its basic position in relation to cultural tourism as follows (Article 1): "tourism is an irreversible social, human, economic and cultural fact. Its influence in the sphere of monuments and sites is particularly important and can but increase because of the known conditions of that activities development."

The Charter (Article 4) acknowledges the problems which tourism can cause; "... cultural tourism cannot be considered separately from the negative, despoiling or destructive effects which the massive and uncontrolled use of monuments and sites entails. The respect of the latter . . . implies the definition and implementation of acceptable standards".

Whilst these standards have not been prepared in a universally acceptable form by any organisation it is interesting to note that they are referred to here just as they are referred to by implication in the Operational Guidelines (Paragraph 24(b) (ii)).

Article 4 goes on to state that "... cultural and natural heritage . . . must take precedence over any other considerations however justified these may be from a social, political or economic point of view." In addition

Article 4 provides that "one must condemn any siting of tourist equipment or services in contradiction with the prime preoccupation due to the respect we owe to the existing cultural heritage." Conservation practice is both more professional and better defined in 1993 than it was in 1976. Nowadays, with the preparation of a proper, professional Conservation and Management Plan, potentially conflicting issues within conservation and tourism (as well as the whole range of other issues which need to be addressed) should be resolved in a way which respects both the integrity of the place in question and the necessity of tourism activity. There is a greater awareness today of the possibility of compromise in solutions without necessarily compromising the integrity of the place.

Allowing for the difficulties always faced in drafting a document which is to be acceptable to people from a number of countries, it is still abundantly clear from the wording of Article 4 that ICOMOS on its Charter of Cultural Tourism recognised the prime consideration as being the proper conservation and management of the sites in question.

It should of course be remembered that the Brussels Charter deals with tourism at "monuments and sites" and is not either specifically or restrictively referring to World Heritage Sites.

The Brussels Charter makes specific reference to the World Heritage Convention in Part II of the Charter. In this part, entitled "Basis for Action", it is stated that "[the Bodies representing Tourism and the Protection of the Heritage] appeal to the will of the States to ensure the fast and energetic implementation of the International Convention for the protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage and of the Nairobi Recommendation²". It is interesting to note that this Charter was prepared in 1976 at the same time as the

² Nairobi 1976, Recommendation Concerning the Safeguarding and Contemporary Role of Historic Areas.

the Safeguarding and Contemporary Role of

international adoption of the World Heritage Convention. At which time there were only a handful of State Parties as signatories to it whereas by 1993 there were over 120 signatories.

The Brussels Charter went on to express the hope that "the World Tourist Organisation, fulfilling its aims, and UNESCO in the framework of the Convention mentioned above, shall exert all efforts in cooperation with the signatory bodies and all others who in future may rally to ensure the implementation of the policy against the effects of tourism's anarchical growth which would result in the denial of its own objectives".

Finally the Brussels Charter outlines, in somewhat complex language (a) the need to train all those involved in tourism whether as providers of services or users of services, (b) the need to educate all people "to understand and respect the monuments, the sites and the cultural heritage" and (c) the need to combat pollution particularly in the ways in which it adds to the destruction of the heritage and (d) the need to use technology in the protection of monuments.

Whilst none of the provisions of the Brussels Charter are particularly helpful from a site specific management point of view – except in setting certain international concepts in place – there is nothing in the Brussels Charter which is in conflict with the World Heritage Convention or the Operational Guidelines. They are, in all respects, compatible.

Over the past two or three years the International Scientific Committee on Cultural Tourism of ICOMOS has given considerable thought to a potential redrafting of the Brussels Charter. Having undertaken this exercise it seemed to the Committee that the inherent dangers in trying to rewrite and re-adopt the Brussels Charter outweighed the benefits which could be achieved by adopting a more modern and more precise wording.

Accordingly it is suggested that ICOMOS should give immediate consideration to the preparation of guidelines under the Brussels Charter which would not only act as indicators for governments preparing statements of protection and management for World Heritage Sites (and possibly other cultural tourism sites), but which would also enable ICOMOS to set down the parameters by which it could carry out the necessary monitoring process on behalf of the World Heritage Committee.

It would not be practical to try and produce guidelines which, without addition or expansion, would be suitable for application to each and every World Heritage Site and its protection and management – even in relation only to cultural tourism. As mentioned above, much of this detail would depend upon the system in place in the particular country the responsibility of the State Party.

However, it would be relatively straightforward to prepare guidelines which covered the matters common to all nations and which, within them, dealt with all the major problems and issues facing the management of cultural tourism at World Heritage Sites.

The requirements of the Convention and the Operational Guidelines

For the purposes of this paper the essential provisions in relation to tourism and management are contained in Section 24(b) (ii) of the Operational Guidelines. These are "adequate legal and/or traditional protection and management mechanisms to ensure the conservation of the nominated cultural property or cultural landscapes" and "...in order to preserve the integrity of cultural sites, particularly those open to large numbers of visitors, the State Party concerned should be able to provide evidence of suitable administrative arrangements to cover the management of the property, its conservation and its accessibility to the public".

As can be seen from this extract from the Operational Guidelines there is not much by way of direct instruction or guidance in respect to the control of visitors/tourists to or at Cultural World Heritage Sites.

The initial requirement is for these matters to be answered to the satisfaction of the World Heritage Committee when nomination of the place to the World Heritage List is being considered. Thereafter it is a question of monitoring the management of each site.

Countries are supposed to provide regular monitoring reports and some do. For example, Australia produces a comprehensive monitoring report in relation to all World Heritage Sites within its jurisdiction at regular intervals.

Section 24(b) (ii) of the Operational Guidelines in relation to management (including tourism management) can be broken down into the following individual requirements, namely;

- (i) legal protective and management mechanisms at the national provincial or municipal level to ensure the property's conservation or
- (ii) well established traditional protection and/or adequate management mechanisms and
- (iii) assurances [by the State Party] of the effective implementation of the laws [and/or traditional protection]
- (iv) evidence of suitable administrative arrangements to cover the management of the property,
- (v) the physical conservation of the property and
- (vi) accessibility by the public to the property.

Whilst these requirements are incorporated in the Operational Guidelines and therefore apply to all countries and sites whose national governments are parties to the Convention, the adequacy of the mechanisms actually required to ensure that adequate standards are met will very much depend upon the system in place in the country in which the particular World Heritage Site is to be found.

Requirements are all very well. It is relatively easy to set out in a nomination for a place such provisions as will fulfil the initial requirements of the World Heritage Committee when they consider the nomination. Such provisions in most cases are put forward in good faith and with the expressed intention on the part of the national government, of the relevant country, that such protective and management recommendations would be put in place and remain in place, and that the property in question would be continually managed in accordance with these provisions.

But circumstances change, governments change and the level of interest generated by a nomination to the World Heritage List is not always maintained. Hence the need for monitoring the continuing management and conservation of World Heritage Sites. However monitoring over 300 sites around the world is a time consuming and expensive business.

Whilst there are provisions for monitoring the continuing management of places inscribed on the World Heritage List and in certain cases their deletion,³ because of a lack of resources actual monitoring practice is not always effective.

The World Heritage Committee, with a small Secretariat in Paris, cannot possibly be expected to regularly

³ A place can be deleted from the List where the property in question has deteriorated to the extent that it has lost those characteristics which determined its inclusion in the World Heritage List or (and this is important) where the intrinsic qualities were already threatened at the time of nomination by action of man and where the necessary corrective measures outlined by the State Party at the time of nomination have not been undertaken (Paragraph 37)

monitor the conduct of cultural tourism at World Heritage Sites much less the overall management of World Heritage Sites. On the other hand ICOMOS, with national committees in over 60 countries, is ideally placed, with the expertise it has in each of the countries represented by a national committee, ideally placed to undertake much of the management and monitoring tasks presently the problem of the World Heritage Committee.

At the same time it must be remembered that ICOMOS resources are by no means unlimited and, whilst the personnel and expertise are available, it would presumably be necessary for UNESCO (perhaps through the World Heritage Committee) to make provision for financial assistance to those national committees of ICOMOS which would be responsible for such tasks.

A better system for monitoring and management – the role of ICOMOS

It is in looking at the protective and management requirements and in particular the monitoring aspect in respect to places inscribed in the World Heritage List that the role of ICOMOS becomes particularly relevant. Clearly the World Heritage Committee in its present form and with its present support system cannot successfully or properly monitor the protection and management of all Cultural World Heritage Sites much less *all* World Heritage Sites. ICOMOS, with a substantial system of over sixty national committees (roughly one for every two countries which are signatories to the Convention) is in a far better position to monitor, and comment on (from time to time), the continuing management of such sites.

The best way the present system could be improved to ensure both the maximum conservation and protection of World Heritage Sites and the proper encouragement and promotion of cultural tourism at these sites is for ICOMOS to take the initiative through a two-pronged approach.

The first part of the approach by ICOMOS should be to assess the possibility of it taking on the monitoring process for cultural sites. Whilst this would be a broader responsibility than that required for the purposes of this session of the conference, namely cultural tourism, it would be unwise to put any system in place which did not include, as a major component, the professional, conservation and commercial standards required for the proper management of cultural tourism.

Of all the cultural sites which are likely to attract tourists those on the World Heritage List, being recognised as the most important (within the confines of the Convention and the Guidelines) of World cultural sites, must surely be accorded the strictest protective and management mechanisms.

The second relates to the standards (including those for tourism) which should be observed in relation to the conservation and protection of such sites. Standards of conservation are an issue with which ICOMOS has a long involvement.

Many years ago ICOMOS began this process, albeit for different reasons, with its adoption of the Venice Charter. Since then a number of countries have produced local charters based on the Venice Charter, which could be used as the basis. That is to say they could be used as the conservation and protection standards for a site at the time of nomination or, in the case of sites already on the List in setting the initial work requirements and standards.

The other part of the standards issue is that of preparing guidelines for tourism at cultural sites. This is referred to earlier.

There are many places, throughout the World, of cultural significance which will neither now or in the future attain the rank and prestige of World Heritage Listing but which are none the less important for regional, national or local

reasons. These will also benefit by having high standards applied by ICOMOS in relation to cultural World Heritage Sites. For if such appropriate controls are in place, in the sense of having achieved international acceptance through an organisation such as ICOMOS, this provides a mechanism which strengthens the hand of all those who wish to ensure the improvement of standards of places which, whilst not of World Heritage Significance, are of regional, national and local importance.

Summary and Recommendations

There is no conflict between the provisions of the World Heritage Convention and the Operational Guidelines on the one hand and the Brussels Charter on the other so far as cultural tourism at World Heritage Sites are concerned.

If ICOMOS wishes to play a continuing and strong role in the broader management processes at cultural World Heritage Sites one of the areas within which it could become involved is that of the management and monitoring process. As mentioned earlier this is, in many countries, a task which can be more easily carried out by ICOMOS than by the World Heritage Committee.

There is however, at present, a real problem in monitoring the status and management of cultural World Heritage

Sites. ICOMOS needs to define its role, with appropriate financial assistance being provided by UNESCO. To ensure that the standards imposed by ICOMOS are consistent throughout the World it could well be that guidelines are required. If these are to be prepared it would seem sensible to do so under the umbrella of the Brussels Charter.

It is also recommended that ICOMOS give immediate and serious consideration, through its International Scientific Committee on Cultural Tourism, to the preparation of appropriate guidelines to further improve the system of control, monitoring and management of World Heritage Sites, specifically in relation to cultural tourism.

REFERENCE:

- * The World Heritage Convention.
- * UNESCO – International Committee for the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage – Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention.
- * The World Heritage Properties Conservation Act, 1983, (Australia).
- * The Brussels Charter 1976 (the ICOMOS Charter on Cultural Tourism).
- * The Nairobi Recommendation 1976, Recommendation Concerning the Safeguarding and Contemporary Role of Historic Areas.
- * The Venice Charter, 1964 (the ICOMOS International Charter for the Conservation and Restoration of Monuments and Sites).