
MEETING OF THE WORLD HERITAGE CONVENTION STATES PARTIES AND ADVISORY BODIES

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Fotos: Ignacio Gómez Arriola



I want to begin by recognizing the clear vision of Director General Irina Bokova and thank her for scheduling this timeframe to continue the direct exchange that we began last year between the Advisory Bodies and the States Parties without the use of an interlocutor. ICOMOS welcomes this direct communication as a way to dissipate so many antagonisms and misunderstandings that have risen in the past regarding the role that we play on both evaluating nominations to the *World Heritage List* and developing State of Conservation Reports. I look forward to hearing all the comments that you will express here today.

As ICOMOS has said many times, our role as an Advisory Body to the World Heritage (WH) Committees rigidly set by the rules that you establish in the Operational Guidelines through the elected Committee members. While ICOMOS may or may not agree with these rules, we firmly adhere to them, and some of the criticism that has been leveled against us in the past seems to stem from the desire on the part of some committee members or states parties to change our recommendations and professional opinions by not adhering to the rules and urging us to disregard them. ICOMOS believes that conversations such as this can help find a way out of these divisive situations.

I want to acknowledge that in the past, the WH Committee and the WH Centre have provided guidance to ICOMOS that we may have misinterpreted as instructions to maintain a higher level of secrecy and confidentiality about our work than was really expected or warranted. Undoubtedly, the policy that we adopted in this regard has periodically generated accusations of lack of transparency as well as of our unwillingness to share with the WH Committee and the States Parties enough information for you to ascertain the rationale for our recommendations, and even more seriously, their validity. While there are certain levels of confidentiality that we must maintain regarding sensitive opinions by some of our individual experts, we also accept the need for ICOMOS to be much more open, informative and transparent about our procedures and our decision-making, not only with the Committee and the States Parties, but also with our own membership, and when necessary, with the general public.

Regarding nominations, ICOMOS shares with many of you the frustration over unsuccessful and delayed inscriptions. We find the methodology currently required in place whereby the entire dossier must be prepared without any assurances of success to be the source of many of the issues of

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Andamios para la restauración de las fachadas del Baptisterio de Santa María di Fiore como soporte de la 18 Asamblea General de ICOMOS. Florencia, Italia, 2014.

Patrimonio vs turismo de masas. Venecia, Italia, 2014.





Rehabilitación de salidas de agua como medida de protección. Conducción de aguas pluviales precolombina en Tiwanaku, Bolivia. 2014.

contention. This means that by the time an entire nomination has been completed, submitted and evaluated by ICOMOS, the expectations of achieving World Heritage status have been blown to their full magnitude: large amounts of money have been spent as has also political capital on the part of national and local elected authorities, and the hopes of the local community have been raised. In other words, the existing process maximizes the potential danger for negative political and economic fallout.

One mechanism recently adopted to avoid such occurrences and ease the tensions surrounding nominations and inscriptions is the initiative to provide “Up-

stream”??? Assistance to States Parties in developing new nominations. ICOMOS fully supports and embraces this approach as a timely decision. Our only reservation about this initiative is that it is still being treated as experimental and in terms of the number of cases where such cooperation is being enacted, it remains extremely limited. Our intent today is to propose an alternative mechanism that could enhance and magnify this type of cooperation in the short run.

I have to underline that if ICOMOS has not undertaken such cooperation in the past, it has been due to the Committee’s insistence over many years that we could not be both judge and jury in nominations, and that for ICOMOS to assist States Parties in the preparation of nominations constituted an unacceptable conflict of interest. This state of affairs which forces ICOMOS to issue “stern” ?? opinions (opiniones serias o severas??) has led many to look upon us as an unwavering and intractable judge, which is something that we do not aspire to be. Our goal is to advise and help in achieving excellence in heritage protection; we want to be your partners, both through our international structure as well as through our National and International Committees.

Things have changed since then and that concern on your part as well as ours about conflicts of interest seems to have dissipated considerably in view of our tacit agreement that there can be no automatic conflict of interest if we all share the same objective of achieving the best possible protection for all properties inscribed on the World Heritage List, and to use them as examples that will have a multiplying effect on the full heritage resources in each of your countries.

One important proposal that we bring for your consideration and discussion today consists of ICOMOS experts working directly with willing States Parties to arrive at an

early determination of the Outstanding Universal Value (OUV) of the properties in your tentative lists and to do that before you launch into the full development of all the required components of the nomination dossiers that we know to be very costly and cumbersome to prepare. With an early determination of OUV firmly in hand, States Parties will be able to move ahead into the nomination stage with the certainty that the only obstacles to inscription would arise from insufficient protection, which is an issue for which solutions are always available. An early determination of OUV will also establish a firmer ground on which the State Party can establish logical boundaries and buffer zones, and build management plans that will effectively protect the OUV, and in this, ICOMOS is also declaring today our willingness to cooperate directly with SPs and in the process, help build capacity in countries that feel they need it. We are not saying that ICOMOS can find OUV for every site, but by working together, we can agree in an early stage on certain properties that should not proceed towards inscription, thereby saving you many expenses and headaches.

A possible challenge in making this happen could be that the Operational Guidelines do not necessarily provide for this process to take place. Thus, the question that we need to ask ourselves is whether we can find the patience to wait for the Operational Guidelines to be amended or whether we are ready to move ahead independent of them. I am not too enthusiastic about waiting, given the historically slow evolution of the Operational Guidelines in integrating new concepts. Let us simply remember that it took eleven years to integrate into the Operational Guidelines the most basic authenticity concepts set forth the *Nara Document* of 1994. Thereby, what ICOMOS is proposing today for your consideration is the development of a new methodology for

reaching early agreements through a direct working.

For this to happen, ICOMOS still has some homework to do: we need to work quickly to unpack and re-pack the way we have been carrying out our World Heritage responsibilities and how we have used our resources. Under the proposed new approach, ICOMOS would be evaluating our own work, something that presents some ethically problems to us and possibly also to you. In order to maintain our ethical principles, the integrity of our professional advice and to avoid any suspicion of bias, ICOMOS will need to establish clearly defined firewalls in order to prevent any individual

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Desazolve y
rehabilitación de
Apantles del siglo XVI
en el Acueducto del
Padre Tembleque.
Hidalgo, 2014.



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within our organization from taking part in evaluating his or her own work. We also will need to develop greater transparency in the use of our expert advisors in determining the OUV of any property. And in addition, we will need to continue to build capacity among our otherwise expert members on the particularities of the *World Heritage Convention*.

As I hinted in passing earlier, ICOMOS is also ready to make ourselves available directly to States Parties to help resolve problems in the state of conservation of all cultural properties inscribed in the World Heritage List in conjunction with your own experts. Our membership is large and diverse enough that we can find individuals with the right sensitivity to work in any cultural context. But beyond our willingness to cooperate, we also call on you, the States Parties, to undertake more bilateral and

multilateral cooperation in helping each other address the threats that are faced by properties in the *List of World Heritage in Danger*, as well as all other challenges identified through the State of Conservation Reports. Often it is unreasonable for the Committee to ask States Parties to overcome problems on their own and for which they do not have the capacity to find workable solutions. We are all painfully aware of the monetary limits of the World Heritage Fund, and for that reason it is important for the international assistance programs of many countries to act directly and outside of the strict scope of the *Convention*. After all, the principle of international cooperation is at the very root and the “raison d’être” of the *World Heritage Convention*.

ICOMOS is also very concerned about the fate of those properties that have failed in their nomination effort. In the past we have

Limpieza y restauración de pintura en Acueducto del Padre Tembleque, siglo XVI. Arquería Mayor de Tepayahualco, Hidalgo- Estado de México, 2014.





witnessed cases where failure to be inscribed has led to diminished protection, and reductions in budgets and human resources. The fact that these properties presented enough merit to make it into your tentative lists and for you to have spent the great effort of preparing a nomination dossier are ample evidence of their great significance and their requirement for an unwavering commitment to their highest form of protection. This is another area in which ICOMOS would wish to help.

By presenting to you with complete frankness our willingness to cooperate directly with each of you, I must also remind you with equal candidness of something you know well: ICOMOS lacks the funds to support the work we are proposing. You know that ICOMOS and the other two Advisory Bodies rely on our contracts with the

UNESCO World Heritage Centre to discharge our World Heritage responsibilities, all within the budgetary limits established by the Committee. Relying as we do on the individual dues paid by our individual members as our main source of unrestricted income, ICOMOS simply does not have the financial capacity to carry out the additional work we are proposing. For this reason, I have the unpopular task of saying that for this cooperation to take place new funding will have to be secured, whether through direct contributions to ICOMOS from visionary States Parties, foundations and institutions wishing to underwrite part of this effort, or from those others among you who simply may be willing to reimburse ICOMOS directly to secure the services of our experts.

Thank you. ☆

Mantenimiento como medida fundamental para la preservación. Mantenimiento de fachadas en Ouro Preto, Minas Gerais, Brasil, 2014.

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