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PROPOSAL BY THE DIRECTOR-GENERAL FOR THE PREPARATION OF A REVISED RECOMMENDATION CONCERNING THE SAFEGUARDING AND CONTEMPORARY ROLE OF HISTORIC AREAS

SUMMARY

In accordance with the *Rules of Procedure concerning Recommendations to Member States and International Conventions covered by the terms of Article IV, paragraph 4, of the Constitution*, the Director-General presents in this document a proposal to prepare a *Revised Recommendation concerning the Safeguarding and Contemporary Role of Historic Areas*, addressing new challenges brought about in the field of the conservation of historic urban landscapes, since the adoption of the 1976 UNESCO *Recommendation concerning the Safeguarding and Contemporary Role of Historic Areas*. The proposal contains a preliminary study of the technical and legal aspects of the problem under consideration. The Executive Board is being invited to provide to the General Conference comments on the proposal.

Decision proposed: paragraph 14.

I. Introduction

1. A corpus of standard-setting documents,¹ including charters and recommendations, exists on the subject of historic cities and their broader setting, which have been useful in guiding policies and practices worldwide, with good results. However, conditions have changed and historic cities are now subject to new development pressures and challenges not present at the time of adoption of the last UNESCO Recommendation on urban sites more than 30 years ago, in 1976 (*UNESCO Recommendation concerning the Safeguarding and Contemporary Role of Historic Areas*).

2. With the current size and foreseen increase of the world's population living in urban areas, supplemented by insufficient policies to recognize and facilitate sustainable use of heritage assets, pressures on historic cities will continue to rise, making the conservation of historic urban areas one of the most daunting tasks of our time. As a direct consequence, the time allocated at World Heritage Committee sessions to debating the impact of contemporary development inside or adjacent to World Heritage designated cities has increased dramatically since the 1990s, with issues ranging from traffic and tourism pressures to high-rise constructions and inner city functional changes.

II. Background

3. Profound changes have occurred over the past 30 years relating to the concept and perception of heritage and, as a result, in the discipline and practice of conservation. The most significant of these included the ICOMOS Charter for the Conservation of Historic Towns and Urban Areas (Washington Charter) in 1987, the adoption of the category of Cultural Landscapes in 1992, the Nara Conference on Authenticity in 1994, the European Landscape Convention (Council of Europe) in 2000, and the adoption of the Convention on Intangible Heritage in 2003, which have all contributed to a rebirth of the analysis of the character of cities.

4. During its 27th session in Paris in 2003, the World Heritage Committee called for the organization of a symposium to discuss how to properly regulate the need for modernization of historic urban environments, while at the same time preserving the values embedded in inherited urban landscapes, in particular of cities inscribed on the World Heritage List. In response, the World Heritage Centre in cooperation with ICOMOS and the City of Vienna, organized the international conference *World Heritage and Contemporary Architecture – Managing the Historic Urban Landscape*, which took place in Vienna, Austria, in May 2005. At this conference a first outline of principles and guidelines was adopted, the so-called “Vienna Memorandum”, which promoted an integrated and harmonious relationship between conservation and new architectural and urban developments in order to preserve the integrity of the historic landscape.

5. The World Heritage Committee at its 29th session in July 2005 in Durban, South Africa, welcomed this document as a necessary tool for discussing and assessing contemporary interventions, including high-rise constructions, in World Heritage cities and their wider setting. The World Heritage Committee furthermore recommended “that the General Conference of UNESCO adopt a new Recommendation to complement and update the existing ones on the subject of conservation of historic urban landscapes, with special reference to the need to link contemporary architecture to the urban historic context” (**Decision 29 COM 5D**).

6. Following the Committee's decision, the Vienna Memorandum formed the basis for the Declaration on the Conservation of Historic Urban Landscapes (HUL), which was adopted by the

¹ In particular the 1964 International Charter for the Conservation and Restoration of Monuments and Sites (Venice Charter), the 1968 UNESCO Recommendation concerning the Preservation of Cultural Property endangered by Public or Private works, the 1976 UNESCO Recommendation concerning the Safeguarding and Contemporary Role of Historic Areas, the 1982 ICOMOS-IFLA International Charter for Historic Gardens (Florence Charter), the 1987 ICOMOS Charter for the Conservation of Historic Towns and Urban Areas (Washington Charter), the 1994 Nara Document on Authenticity, as well as the HABITAT II Conference and Agenda 21, which was ratified by Member States in Istanbul (Turkey) in June 1996.

15th General Assembly of States Parties to the World Heritage Convention in October 2005 at UNESCO Headquarters in Paris (**Resolution 15 GA 7**).

III. Possible scope of the regulating action proposed

7. In order to adequately prepare the proposal, the World Heritage Centre has started a process of regional consultation meetings to receive expert input on concepts, definitions and approaches to historic urban landscapes as potential content material for a revised UNESCO Recommendation on the subject. To date three regional expert meetings have been organized by the World Heritage Centre and its partners, in Jerusalem (June 2006), Saint Petersburg, Russia (January 2007) and Olinda, Brazil (November 2007).

8. Further to this, the World Heritage Centre has started reviewing the existing standard-setting documents, and in particular the UNESCO *Recommendation concerning the Safeguarding and Contemporary Role of Historic Areas* (Nairobi, 26 November 1976). In particular, an Expert Group of 15 international specialists from different geo-cultural regions, professional backgrounds, and international organizations and research institutions met at UNESCO Headquarters, in September 2006, to start an evaluation process and orient the activities aimed at preparing a revised Recommendation.

9. A critical review of the 1976 text emphasized that a revised Recommendation was needed to focus on the specific nature and needs of cities as living heritage. It concluded that current urban management processes needed to look beyond the traditional notion of historic centres and their surroundings as “special districts”, to include a broader context, both in terms of landscapes and in terms of values to be preserved. The 1976 UNESCO Recommendation was therefore considered inadequate to deal with today’s urban dynamic processes in a globalized context.

10. More specifically, the main conclusions of these meetings emphasized the importance of a number of aspects that have profoundly changed the discipline and practice of urban heritage conservation, such as:

- the increasing importance attributed to the concept of historic urban landscape, as a stratification of previous and current urban dynamics, with an interplay between the natural and built environment;
- the greater role taken by contemporary architecture in historic areas, and the issue of sensitivity of new architecture to context;
- the economics and changing role of cities, with an emphasis on non-local processes such as tourism and urban development, with outside actors of change;
- the issues of “authenticity” and “integrity” in relation to living historic cities;
- the meaning and the use of “buffer zones” in relation to historic urban landscapes;
- the “intangible” values associated with urban historic areas.

11. Following the review of the 1976 UNESCO Recommendation and the Vienna Memorandum, which led to the conclusion that fundamental changes in concept and perception of heritage have occurred during the past 30 years, this Expert Group supported the drafting of a revised standard-setting document.

12. In order to involve all the relevant actors in the process, the World Heritage Centre has coordinated an ad hoc Working Group comprising partner organizations and institutions, including the International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS), the International Centre for the Study of the Preservation and Restoration of Cultural Property (ICCROM), the International Union

of Architects (UIA), the International Federation of Landscape Architects (IFLA), the International Federation for Housing and Planning (IFHP), the Organization of World Heritage Cities (OWHC), and the Aga Khan Trust for Culture (AKTC).

IV. Proposal to prepare a Revised Recommendation concerning the Safeguarding and Contemporary Role of Historic Areas

13. In light of the foregoing, the Director-General proposes the preparation of a *Revised Recommendation concerning the Safeguarding and Contemporary Role of Historic Areas*, which would address today's dynamic urban processes in a globalized context and would formulate principles and norms in this regard. In accordance with the *Rules of Procedure concerning Recommendations to Member States and International Conventions covered by the terms of Article IV, paragraph 4, of the Constitution*, the Executive Board is invited to provide its comments to the General Conference at its 35th session (2009). The Executive Board is thus called upon to decide whether or not to recommend to the General Conference at its 35th session that a revised Recommendation should be prepared and that the General Conference should instruct the Director-General to prepare a report setting forth the position with regard to the problem to be regulated and to the scope of the regulation action proposed, accompanied by a draft text of a revised Recommendation, for adoption at its 36th session (2011), in accordance with the aforementioned Rules of Procedure.

V. Proposed draft decision

14. Taking into consideration the above-mentioned points, the Executive Board may wish to adopt a decision along the following lines:

The Executive Board,

1. Recalling 177 EX/Decision 35,
2. Having examined document 179 EX/25,
3. Taking into consideration new approaches being developed on the conservation of historic urban landscapes,
4. Referring to the *Rules of Procedure concerning Recommendations to Member States and International Conventions covered by the terms of Article IV, paragraph 4, of the Constitution*,
5. Welcomes the proposal of the Director-General to prepare a *Revised Recommendation concerning the Safeguarding and Contemporary Role of Historic Areas* so that the Recommendation addresses today's dynamic urban processes in a globalized context and formulates principles and norms in this regard more adequately;
6. Recommends that the General Conference decide at its 35th session (2009) that the question dealt with in the proposal should be regulated at the international level in the form of a Revised Recommendation concerning the Safeguarding and Contemporary Role of Historic Areas;
7. Invites the Director-General to report to the Executive Board, at its 181st session, on the activities undertaken on the subject of the safeguarding and contemporary role of historic areas.