



International World Heritage Expert Meeting on

Visual Integrity

6 to 9 March 2013

Agra, India

BACKGROUND DOCUMENT

Prepared by the World Heritage Centre, with inputs from ICOMOS, ICCROM and IUCN

1. Introduction

At its 36th session (St Petersburg, 2012), the World Heritage Committee discussed a number of state of conservation reports where the question of 'visual integrity' and the 'protection of important views' came up. The authorities of India informed the World Heritage Committee that they would offer an international expert meeting to review this question.

The Government of India has offered to host this World Heritage Expert Meeting on Visual Integrity from 6 to 9 March 2013 in Agra. The regional groups were invited to identify suitable experts and observers to attend the meeting.

The main objectives of this expert meeting are to identify issues concerning "visual integrity" and to review related text in the *Operational Guidelines*. The meeting will also contribute to a better understanding of the notion of integrity for cultural heritage, which has been previously discussed (Expert Meeting Al Ain, United Arab Emirates, 2012) and will assist the World Heritage Committee in future decision making.

The report of the expert meeting will be presented to the World Heritage Committee at its 37th session in June 2013.

2. Introduction to the concepts related to World Heritage

'Integrity' entered the *Operational Guidelines* as early as 1977 as "conditions of integrity" for sites nominated under the four natural criteria.¹ This remained until the major revision of the *Operational Guidelines* completed in 2005², when the criteria were merged into one set of 10 criteria and the 'conditions of integrity' were applied for all properties. A footnote to paragraph 89 of the *Operational Guidelines* "Examples of the application of the conditions of integrity to

¹ <http://whc.unesco.org/archive/opguide77b.pdf>

² <http://whc.unesco.org/archive/opguide02.pdf>

properties nominated under criteria (i) - (vi) are under development". This was further discussed at the World Heritage Expert Meeting on Integrity for Cultural Heritage (Al Ain, March 2012) and presented to the 36th session of the World Heritage Committee.

As a concept pertaining to both cultural and natural heritage, integrity is defined as the wholeness and intactness of the property, for cultural heritage, the site, monument or monuments, cultural landscape, or ensemble of any of these.

The term "visual integrity" is not indicated in the *Convention*, nor is it mentioned in the *Operational Guidelines*. The concept of visual integrity is frequently considered a crucial element related to the preservation of cultural and natural World Heritage sites. "Visual integrity" may pertain specifically to vistas, panoramas, viewpoints, and silhouettes. Visual Integrity can also be taken to mean the capacity of heritage to maintain visual distinctiveness and visually demonstrate its relationship with its surroundings.

Visual quality may be also a key consideration in the inscription of natural properties under criterion (vii) (this will be discussed further in an IUCN thematic study on this criterion to be launched at the 37th session of the World Heritage Committee). It may also be intimately related to wider aesthetic qualities of sites that can include visual and non-visual aspects. It may also be noted that visual qualities will frequently be important to the protection and management of sites, even if their Outstanding Universal Value does not directly have strong visual qualities, notably in assuring that sites meet the expectations of visitors by being well managed, and free of inappropriate development. For instance the Outstanding Universal Value of a fossil or geological World Heritage site may not be evident in the field, but its impression as a World Heritage site will depend on whether visitors can see and comprehend its landscapes and rock exposures.

The closest approximation to the concept of "visual integrity" within the Operational Guidelines is "**important views**", which is mentioned in paragraph 104 of section II.F, within the definition of a buffer zone:

"104. For the purposes of effective protection of the nominated property, a buffer zone is an area surrounding the nominated property which has complementary legal and/or customary restrictions placed on its use and development to give an added layer of protection to the property. This should include the immediate setting of the nominated property, important views and other areas or attributes that are functionally important as a support to the property and its protection. The area constituting the buffer zone should be determined in each case through appropriate mechanisms. Details on the size, characteristics and authorized uses of a buffer zone, as well as a map indicating the precise boundaries of the property and its buffer zone, should be provided in the nomination."

While integrity for cultural heritage was further discussed (see for details the background documents for the expert meeting on integrity for cultural heritage, Al Ain, UAE, March 2012) but is still not defined in the Operational Guidelines in detail, the term of visual integrity entered debates successively. It was specifically discussed at an Expert Meeting on natural heritage held at the Parc National de la Vanoise in 1996, following the proposal to unify the natural and cultural criteria into one set of criteria and as a consequence create unified definitions for integrity that applied to both natural and cultural heritage. In 2005, a general definition of integrity of cultural heritage was included in the Operational Guidelines for the first time, but specific definitions were left for future reflections.

During the Al Ain Expert Meeting on Integrity for Cultural Heritage (United Arab Emirates, March 2012), it was proposed that the Operational Guidelines be revised in order to include key concepts of integrity for cultural heritage. The proposed revision of the Operational Guidelines would mention, for example, the need for cultural landscapes and archaeological sites to have “visual integrity”. It would also state that the integrity of historic towns is based partially on its “visual relationships”, both internal and external. Finally, it would mention that there is a need to protect the views to and from any cultural heritage properties that are classified as monuments. However these definitions have yet to be fully explored by the World Heritage Committee (see Decision 36 COM 13.1) within the framework of the *Convention*. Equally IUCN notes that whilst visual quality is important there are clear potential difficulties in introducing further complexity to the World Heritage Convention by splitting the clearly defined and integrated concept of integrity into different tranches.

Questions of “visual integrity” were discussed at many sessions of the World Heritage Committee. Therefore in the following section a selected number of key cases will be presented to illustrate these debates:

3. Key cases where issues related to visual integrity threaten the Outstanding Universal Value of a World Heritage property

A full understanding of the importance of visual integrity requires examining its key factors and evaluating cases where a World Heritage site is at risk of losing its Outstanding Universal Value due to loss of visual integrity. The following sites have had major conservation problems related to their visual integrity and the protection of important views;

Historic Centre of Vienna (Austria)

Type of site: Historic City Centre; Threat: High-rise buildings

At the time of its inscription, the World Heritage Committee recommended the following for the site ([Decision 25 COM X.A](#)):

“While taking note of the efforts already made for the protection of the historic town of Vienna, the Committee recommended that the State Party undertake the necessary measures to review the height and volume of the proposed new development near the Stadtpark, east of the Ringstrasse, so as not to impair the visual integrity of the historic town. Furthermore, the Committee recommended that special attention be given to continuous monitoring and control of any changes to the morphology of the historic building stock.”

The development, known as the Wien-Mitte Urban Development Project, was located adjacent to the site itself, and within its buffer zone. The following year, the World Heritage Committee expressed that if this development project was carried out, the damage to the Outstanding Universal Value to the site would be sufficient for the direct **removal from the World Heritage List**, without first including the site on the List of World Heritage in Danger ([Decision 26 COM 21B.35](#)).

The Austrian government re-evaluated this project and revised it in order to limit the visual impact on the site, and also submitted a proper management plan. However, by 2003 a high-rise building that was not part of the Wien-Mitte Urban Development Project was still being built. In 2009, the site was mentioned again at a World Heritage Committee meeting

([Decision 33COM 7B.89](#)) due to the planned construction of a high-rise building for the Vienna train station, which would obstruct the view of part of the site:

“4. Regrets that the State Party did not provide the requested comprehensive visual impact assessment of the entire project, and that there was no visual impact assessment used as a basis for determining the appropriate height for the planned building;

5. Strongly urges the State Party to carry out the comprehensive visual impact assessment of the entire project, as requested by the World Heritage Committee at its 32nd session;

6. Requests the State Party to halt any building permission for this project until the visual assessment has been reviewed by ICOMOS so that the project would not have any negative impact on the Outstanding Universal Value of the property;”

As per the Committee’s requests, the height of the building was reduced and a visual impact assessment was carried out for the site.

In 2010, in [Decision 34 COM 7B.76](#), the World Heritage Committee requested further modifications to this project, now known as the Main Railway Station project:

5. Also notes that the Main Railway Station project was reduced in height as a result of the decisions taken by the World Heritage Committee and requests that a further height reduction of the western towers and related features be carried out to completely eliminate any visual impacts on the Belvedere property;

6. Also requests that the World Heritage Centre be informed of any further changes to the current planning of the Main Railway Station project that could alter the findings of the Visual Impact Study

In 2011, in [Decision 35 COM 7B.84](#), due to the persistent problem of high-rise buildings, the World Heritage Committee recommended a reactive monitoring mission to assess the state of the site:

“5. Also requests the State Party, given the multiplicity of development projects in the properties, their buffer zones and beyond, to invite a joint World Heritage Centre/ICOMOS reactive monitoring mission to the properties to assess:

- a) the proposed changes in the design of Vienna Main Station,*
- b) the potential impact of new developments on the properties,*
- c) the integrity of views from within key places of the properties “*

Historic Centre of Macao (China)

Type of site: Cultural; Historic city; Threats: proposed high-rise buildings

In August 2007, the World Heritage Centre was informed through various sources, including a group of citizens who are living in Macao Special Administrative Region (Macao SAR), China, that some on-going development projects in the Historic Centre of Macao, involving high-rise buildings, were affecting the visual integrity of the property, notably the setting of the Guia Lighthouse, which has been serving Macao since 1865 sitting on top of the Guia Hill, at some 90 meters above the sea level. According to the report, the new constructions (allegedly reaching a height of 135 meters) would be obscuring the view of the Lighthouse from the sea, thus undermining its very function and character as a landmark of the City.

In March 2008, the World Heritage Centre received a letter from the Chinese authorities and a report prepared by the Director of Cultural Affairs Bureau of Macao SAR Government.

Considering the concerns expressed by members of its community as well as UNESCO, the State Party of China had decided to review the existing building regulations in the areas surrounding the property with an aim to mitigate potential negative impacts of development projects. These new regulations concerned in particular the areas outside buffer zone 2 surrounding the Guia Lighthouse and Monte Fortress, another site which lies in buffer zone 1, where lower building height limits were established. Accordingly, the height of the high-rise constructions that had raised concern in the vicinity of the Guia Lighthouse was reduced from 135 to 90 Mt. A map was enclosed with the State Party's report identifying the newly proposed land-use regulations.

The World Heritage Centre and ICOMOS welcome the rapid response of the Macao SAR Government to the concerns expressed by the community as well as the measures it has taken to mitigate possible negative impacts of development projects on the visual integrity of the World Heritage property. At the same time, considering also the complex topography of the site, they consider that a reactive monitoring mission to the property is necessary to determine the appropriateness of these new regulations with respect to future possible development proposals.

In July 2008, the World Heritage Committee welcomed the measures taken by the State Party of China to mitigate possible negative impacts of development projects on the visual integrity of the World Heritage property by reducing height limits for construction in sensitive areas surrounding the Guia Hill and the Monte Fortress. It further noted with concern that urban development around the property's buffer zones, especially around the Guia Hill and Lighthouse and the Monte Fortress (Mount Fort), might impact negatively on the visual integrity of the property. These concerns had already led to the State Party issuing a Chief Executive Directive 83/2008 in April 2008 designed to mitigate this threat in sensitive areas through the use of building height controls. While welcoming these measures the World Heritage Committee requested the State Party to invite a joint World Heritage Centre/ICOMOS reactive monitoring mission to the property to determine whether the measures are adequate to ensure the long term protection of the Outstanding Universal Value of the property.

A joint World Heritage Centre/ICOMOS reactive monitoring mission visited Macao from 18 to 24 January 2009. Its report covered the main concerns raised in [32 COM 7B.68](#) but also identified another serious issue and made eleven recommendations for staged action. The mission found that the Chief Executive Directive 83/2008 introducing measures to reduce the height of the buildings constructed or planned near the Guia Hill and Lighthouse and establish new controls over the area provided adequate protection to maintain the visual connections between the Guia Lighthouse and the sea, towards the east, and to the Monte Fortress, to the west. It noted, however, that to the south, the visual connection had already been compromised by several tall buildings on the more distant reclaimed land, mostly constructed before the inscription, and it therefore concluded that the newly proposed buildings near the Guia Hill's southern buffer zone would not constitute a problem once their height had been reduced in line with Chief Executive Directive.

The State Party assured the World Heritage Committee that the monuments inside the property are in a very good state of conservation through continuous efforts that are in line with conservation charters and supported by sound financial resources made possible by Macao's growing economy. The response also confirmed that measures adopted to mitigate against the negative impacts of development projects on the visual integrity of the property are as outlined in its response to the World Heritage Committee in March 2008 and subsequently written into legislation under Chief Executive Directive 83/2008.

In 2011, the State Party reported upon certain legal and regulative measures. These include the Urban Plan previously referred to, which is 'in drafting process'; regulation 01/DSSOPT/2009, which would have been in place on or about the time of the World Heritage Committee's request, and is therefore not new; and the new 'law to safeguard Macao's World Heritage' which is 'now in the final stages due to be reviewed by the Legislative Assembly in the fall of 2011'. There are no specific indications as to when these plans and regulatory measures are expected to be put into force.

The state of conservation of the Historic Centre of Macao will be further examined by the World Heritage Committee at its 37th session.

Historic Centre of Prague (Czech Republic)

Type of site: Historic City Centre; Threat: High-rise buildings

In 2007, the World Heritage Committee expressed concern over proposed high-rise buildings that would be constructed within the site's buffer zone ([Decision 31COM 7B.94](#)):

"2. Expresses its serious concern about the proposed high-rise building projects within the buffer zone which potentially could impact on the visual integrity of the Historic Centre of Prague;

3. Requests the State Party to reconsider current building projects as to their impacts on the World Heritage property's Outstanding Universal Value, and also requests that any new construction projects respect the Outstanding Universal Value and important views to and from the property;"

A 2008 mission to the Historic Centre of Prague concluded that the rapid economic development of the city generated unplanned pressure on the site. Population density grew, tourism-related activities became more prominent, the built fabric of the site deteriorated, and the city centre's historic urban grain suffered as a result. Finally, the mission drew attention to the fact that several high-rise buildings projects in the vicinity of the historic city centre (some of them located outside the buffer zone) had an adverse effect on the integrity of the site. A study carried out demonstrated that the high-rise buildings drew visual attention away from historic buildings and introduced "reflections of a different value system" into the historic landscape. A computer simulation was used by this study to determine the points at which high-rise buildings would have a visual impact on the site, so as to prevent further developments there.

Theoretically, since the Pankrác Plain is located within the site's secondary buffer zone, controlled development was possible within the area; however, after the area became privately-owned in the 90's, there have been proposals to construct new buildings there. As of 2008, these new proposals had been approved by the National Heritage Institute and the City Development Authority of Prague, due to the fact that they would not significantly worsen the impact caused by other high-rise buildings. The mission concluded that more damage to the views of the historic city centre should be avoided. To promote this, the mission recommended limiting the height of these new projects to a maximum of 60-70 meters, as opposed to 100 meters which was the previous maximum. It also proposed to cluster all new high-rises in a location where they would not negatively impact the site, as opposed to scattering them throughout the historic city centre.

The points were taken up by the World Heritage Committee in [Decision 32COM 7B.86](#):

“5. Encourages the State Party to adopt the following measures proposed by the joint World Heritage Centre / ICOMOS mission to reduce further negative impacts of high rise construction in the property and its buffer zone:

a) complete and adopt the high-rise limitations plan, in order to avoid possible visual intrusion into the historic urban landscape of Prague;

b) conduct an evaluation of the present buffer zones of the Historic Centre in order to assess their effectiveness in protecting the visual integrity of the city and, if needed, extend these and adopt appropriate related zoning regulations;

c) limit, in the case of the Pankrác Plain, the height of the new high-rise constructions to a maximum of 60-70 m, in order to avoid visual impacts on the historic urban landscape of the property;

d) inform the World Heritage Centre, in accordance with Paragraph 172 of the Operational Guidelines, of any project that could affect the visual integrity of the World Heritage site.”

Unfortunately, these recommendations were not heeded, and a World Heritage Centre/ICOMOS joint mission to Prague in 2010 found that two high-rise building projects were going ahead as planned. The justification for this was that the projects had been approved before the 2008 mission. The joint mission recalled the earlier recommendations and urged the entities responsible for the site’s management to limit the construction of those high-rise buildings. Furthermore, the World Heritage Committee recalled the joint mission’s recommendations in further decisions ([Decision 34COM 7B.82](#), [Decision 35COM 7B.89](#))

In 2012, building permission for some developments was revoked. The World Heritage Committee welcomed this decision ([Decision 36COM 7B.73](#)).

Bordeaux, Port of the Moon (France)

Type of site: Architectural Ensemble/Historic City; Threat: Bridge construction

In 2008, shortly after Bordeaux, Port of the Moon, was inscribed on the World Heritage List, the World Heritage Committee denounced the destruction of one of the main components of the site, the Pertuis Bridge. In [Decision 32COM 7B.89](#), it requested the following:

9. Further requests the State Party to invite a joint World Heritage Centre / ICOMOS Reactive Monitoring mission to evaluate to what degree the Outstanding Universal Value of the property was compromised due to the destruction of the Pertuis Swing Bridge, and the impact of the drawbridge project on the Outstanding Universal Value and visual integrity of the property, ...”

A threat to the visual integrity of the property was the planned construction of a drawbridge across the Garonne River, the Bacalade-Bastide Bridge. In 2009, in [Decision 33COM 7B.101](#), the World Heritage Committee urged the French government to take steps to rectify the situation:

“6. Urges however the State Party to reconsider the proposed Bacalan-Bastide bridge project and to study alternatives that do not include the transit of large vessels in front of the historic areas, allowing only smaller ships to access the harbor, in order to limit visual impact on the property, as well as to consider the relocation of the large vessel berthing area downstream of the proposed location of the bridge;

7. Requests furthermore the State Party to continue with studies aiming to limit the visual impact on the property;

The Committee strongly urged the French government to place the property on the List of World Heritage in Danger, and threatened to remove the site from the World Heritage List if something was not done about the damage. Furthermore, the Committee also decided to apply the Reinforced Monitoring Mechanism (RMM) to the property in order to adequately measure and contain any potential damage to its integrity.

By the World Heritage Committee meeting in 2010, the French government had taken steps to reverse the damage to the visual integrity of the Site, as well as mitigate further damage. The Bacalade-Bastide Bridge was redesigned, and a proposal for the regulation of aquatic traffic was submitted for approval. In [Decision 34COM 7B.86](#), the World Heritage Committee welcomed this information:

“6. Also welcomes the proposed modification to the proposed Bacalan-Bastide bridge and urges the State Party to pursue their on-going studies for additional reduction of the visual impact of the bridge and to submit the final plans to the World Heritage Centre for assessment by the Advisory Bodies.”

Mt. St. Michel and its Bay (France)

Type of site: site/landscape context; Threat: Environmental/Wind turbines

In 2010, the World Heritage Committee expressed its concerns regarding the proposed installation of wind turbines within the bay around Mt. St. Michel, which would disrupt the landscape for which the monument was known. The French government did recognize the need to establish and monitor an “area of landscape influence” where new structures could alter the Outstanding Universal Value of the property, even if they are beyond the Buffer Zone. In 2011, a State of Conservation report handed in to the World Heritage Centre identified six proposed wind turbine projects within 20km of the Site but beyond the Buffer Zone. The World Heritage Committee requested in [Decision 35COM 7B.91](#) that the following actions be taken for the site:

“4. Requests the State Party:

a) to develop a draft Retrospective Statement of Outstanding Universal Value as the basis for the protection and management of the property and thus avoid any irreversible impacts of development projects on the property, including wind turbines,

b) to initiate a management plan, based on the Statement of Outstanding Universal Value, in order to strengthen the protection and governance of the entire property, and to indicate a timetable to implement the creation of an Interregional Monitoring Committee for the management of the property,

c) to invite a World Heritage Centre/Advisory Bodies reactive monitoring mission in 2011 to examine the prevailing logic for the definition of the context of the ensemble and to better understand the impact of the wind turbines on the Outstanding Universal Value of the property and to prepare the draft Retrospective Statement of Outstanding Universal Value prior to and as support for the discussions of this mission,

d) to suspend all wind power projects approved and underway which would have a visual impact on the views toward and from the property whilst awaiting examination of the results

of the reactive monitoring mission by the World Heritage Committee at its 36th session in 2012”.

Cologne Cathedral (Germany)

Type of site: Single monument; Threat: High-rise building

The main visual threat to this monument was the development of high-rise buildings around the Messe/Deutz train station, on the eastern bank of the Rhine River, and the proposed construction of office complexes in the area. A mission was sent to Cologne in November of 2003 in order to attend a symposium on the execution of these high-rise construction projects in the city, as well as analyze the visual impact they might have had on the site. The mission analyzed pictures taken within the city from areas that had selected views towards the city, and concluded that several of these high-rise buildings disturbed the “spatial quality” of Cologne Cathedral. As there was not a clear definition of what constituted a visual “disturbance” of the site, the mission based its decision on the fact that the high-rise buildings obstructed the view towards the cathedral.

Cologne Cathedral was put on the List of World Heritage in Danger in 2004 ([Decision 28COM 15C.1](#)) due to the construction of high-rise buildings that dominated the city’s skyline and threatened its position as a visual landmark for the city, and added in [Decision 28COM 15B.70](#) that it:

“4. Urges the City of Cologne to reconsider the current building plans as to their visual impact on the World Heritage property of Cologne Cathedral and requests that any new construction should respect the visual integrity of the property...”

A Visual Impact Study was commissioned by the Cologne City Council in 2004. The Study concluded that the high-rise buildings would not have an adverse visual impact on the cathedral. However, an independent evaluation of the Visual Impact Study of the site was carried out by the University of Aachen in May of 2005. The evaluation concluded that the “classic” view of the cathedral, identified as the view from the Deutz neighborhood on the eastern bank of the Rhine River, was relatively unperturbed by the development of high-rise buildings. However, the views of the cathedral from the main city access routes, which form a significant part of everyday life for the citizens of Cologne, would be obstructed to the point where the cathedral would no longer be a prominent feature of the city’s landscape. Furthermore, the view of the cathedral from certain parts of the city was already completely obstructed by high-rise buildings. The study also concluded that further high-rise development projects were inadvisable, and suggested the creation of a monitored area on the eastern bank of the Rhine River in order to prevent the construction of future high-rise buildings that would obstruct other views of the cathedral.

The following year, in [Decision 29COM 7A.29](#), the World Heritage Committee added that it:

8. Regreted the construction of the RZVK tower and reiterates its request that the State Party reconsider current building projects around the ICE-terminal as to their visual impact on the property and that any new construction should respect the visual integrity of the property.”

Timely action on behalf of the State Party resulted in the site being removed from the List of World Heritage in Danger in 2006, as stated in [Decision 30COM 7A.30](#).

Dresden Elbe Valley (Germany) (Inscribed from 2004 to 2009)

Type of site: Cultural Landscape; Threat: Bridge construction

The case of the Cultural Landscape of the Dresden Elbe Valley stands as one of the key examples of visual integrity being a crucial element of a World Heritage site's Outstanding Universal Value. The property was inscribed in 2004 and only 2 years later, at the 30th session of the World Heritage Committee (2006), the property was put on the List of World Heritage in Danger due to the planned construction of a bridge (the Waldschlösschen Bridge) that partially obstructed the view of the city's historic urban landscape. Specifically, the bridge would span the Elbe River within the property and split it in two. The World Heritage Committee threatened to remove the site from the World Heritage List if this bridge was completed.

Technical studies carried out by Technical University of Aachen came to the following conclusions: 1. The Waldschlösschen Bridge does not fit in with existing series of Dresden City Bridges; 2. The Waldschlösschen Bridge obscures a number of views of the Dresden skyline and the Elbe valley which are of historical importance as well as continuing relevance to daily life in the city and 3. The Waldschlösschen Bridge cuts into the cohesive landscape of the Elbe River bend at its most sensitive point, splitting it irreversibly into two halves.

Despite the efforts of the World Heritage Committee and UNESCO, the construction of the bridge, which had previously been approved by democratic vote, continued, and as a result the World Heritage Committee decided to remove the property from the World Heritage List in 2009. The Decision ([Decision 33 COM 7A.26](#)) reads as follows:

2. *Recalling Decisions 30 COM 7B.77, 31 COM 7A.27 and 32 COM 7A.26, adopted at its 30th (Vilnius, 2006), 31st (Christchurch, 2007) and 32nd (Quebec City, 2008) sessions respectively, and in particular its concern that the construction project of the Waldschlösschen Bridge would irreversibly damage the Outstanding Universal Value and integrity of the property in accordance with Paragraph 179 (b) of the Operational Guidelines,*

3. *Also recalling the report provided by the reinforced monitoring mission of February 2008 confirming that the current bridge project would irreversibly damage the Outstanding Universal Value and integrity of the property,*

4. *Further recalling that, according to Article 6.1 of the Convention, the properties inscribed on the World Heritage List constitute World Heritage, the protection of which is the duty of the international community as a whole and recalling further the duty of the international community to assist and to cooperate with States Parties in their endeavour to conserve such heritage,*

5. *Recalling as well that States Parties have the obligation under the Convention to protect and conserve the World Cultural and Natural Heritage situated on their territory, notably to ensure that effective and active measures are taken for the protection and conservation of such heritage,*

6. *Notes with deep regret that the State Party was unable to fulfil its obligations defined in the Convention, in particular the obligation to protect and conserve the Outstanding Universal Value, as inscribed, of the World Heritage property of the Dresden Elbe Valley;*

7. *Regrets that the entreaties of the World Heritage Committee at its 30th, 31st, and 32nd sessions failed to protect the property;*

8. *Also regrets the fact that the authorities have not halted the project, detrimental to the Outstanding Universal Value of the property and that the damage already caused has not been reversed;*

9. *Decides to delete the Dresden Elbe Valley (Germany) from the World Heritage List...*

Ultimately, the case was seen as a failure to implement the World Heritage Convention, both at a national/regional and international level. It was also considered a loss for the entire international community.

Historic Centre of Riga (Latvia)

Type of site: Historic City Centre; Threat: High-rise buildings

In 2003, it was brought to the attention of the World Heritage Committee that the Latvian government had authorized a construction project for high-rise buildings within the buffer zone of the historic city centre of Riga. The construction projects were located across the Daugava river from the historic city centre, and on flat land, thus blocking the view of the site. In [Decision 27COM 7B.69](#), the World Heritage Committee stated that it:

"5. Therefore requests the State Party to review the construction project and to fully guarantee the respect of the approved detailed plan of Kipsala in order to protect the World Heritage property and its visual integrity"

A law that protected the historic city centre had been adopted that same year, but not implemented correctly. Furthermore, the existence of these projects had been known when the site was nominated for the World Heritage List in 1997, but they were not included in the site's nomination file. The World Heritage Committee reiterated its request in 2004 and 2005, stating the following ([Decision 28COM 15B.74](#)):

"5. Requests the State Party to carefully review all projects foreseen in the area and its buffer zone, including conducting a visual impact study, and to provide an up-date report to the World Heritage Centre by 1 February 2005 including a confirmation that any new building will fully respect the visual integrity of the Historical Centre of Riga and the historical watercourses will be preserved as open public space without any new buildings for examination by the Committee at its 29th session in 2005."

And a year later ([Decision 29COM 7B.78](#)):

"5. Requests the State Party to carefully review all projects foreseen in the area and its buffer zone, and to conduct a visual impact study to ensure that the new and recently constructed buildings will fully respect, in accordance with the recommendations of the Vienna Memorandum on "World Heritage and Contemporary Architecture - Managing the Historic Urban Landscape" referred to in Decision 29 COM 5.3, adopted at its 29th session (Durban, 2005), the visual integrity of the Historical Centre of Riga as well as preserving the historical watercourses as open public space without any new buildings"

"6. Also requests the State Party to submit a report to the World Heritage by 1 February 2007 Centre on the progress made in the implementation of the preservation and development plan as well as an update on the abovementioned study on projects which may have an impact on the visual integrity of the property, for examination by the Committee at its 31st session (2007),"

In 2008, ICOMOS and the World Heritage Committee carried out a monitoring mission to assess the state of conservation of the site. The mission concluded that the completed

buildings damaged the visual integrity of the property, and that future construction projects needed to be modified to eliminate the possibility of degrading the visual integrity of the site.

The Latvian government has since amended the development plans for the city of Riga so as to protect the historic centre of the city, and was recognized by the World Heritage Committee ([33COM 7B.111](#)):

“4. Acknowledges the efforts of the State Party to modify the "Daugava Left-bank Silhouette Development Concept" in reducing the height and density of planned buildings, and re-locating these buildings farther from the water's edge, in ways which reduce the visual impact of the planned projects on the Outstanding Universal Value and integrity of the property”

Vilnius Historic Centre (Lithuania)

Type of site: Historic City Centre; Threat: Deterioration of urban environment/High-rise buildings

The threat of high-rise buildings was first discussed at the sessions of the World Heritage Committee in 2005 ([Decision 29COM 7B.79](#)). By 2006, some progress had been made towards establishing a legal and regulatory framework for the protection of heritage, which the World Heritage Committee commended ([Decision 30COM 7B.86](#)):

“3. Notes the positive efforts made by the Ministry of Culture and the Municipality of Vilnius during the last two years to strengthen the legal and regulatory framework for heritage conservation, specifically the steps undertaken to address the concerns expressed by the Committee with regard to the high-rise buildings constructed and planned in the vicinity of the historic centre of Vilnius and their visual impact on the World Heritage property”

Since then, the World Heritage Committee has been requesting an integrated management plan and a detailed description of all current construction projects in the site ([Decision 32COM 7B.99](#)). The Lithuanian government has begun development of a legal framework for the protection of the site's historic heritage, but information on it has been lacking, as stated by the World Heritage Committee ([Decision 33COM 7B.112](#)):

“7. Reiterates its request for the State Party to submit the information requested by the World Heritage Committee at its 32nd session related to the legislation covering the property (including any new legislation), the planning instruments in force for the protection of the property, and the regulations concerning the construction of high buildings which may have an impact on the visual integrity”

And two years later ([Decision 35COM 7B.98](#)):

“5. Also reiterates its request to the State Party to provide adequate information in regard to regulations concerning the construction of high-rise buildings, beyond the proposed buffer zone which may have an impact on the Outstanding Universal Value including the visual integrity of the property”

Cathedral, Alcázar, and Archivo de Indias in Seville (Spain)

Type of site: Ensemble of Monuments; Threat: High-rise building

The visual integrity of the World Heritage property at Seville was threatened by several construction projects located just outside the site's buffer zone, among them the Pelli-Cajasol Tower. ICOMOS has carried out monitoring missions in the city and has concluded that the

Pelli-Cajasol Tower has a significant and largely negative impact on the Site's visual integrity. The Tower blocks the capacity of the Site to express its particular context and its relationship with its surroundings, particularly with the river Guadalquivir. The World Heritage Committee first expressed its concern during the 33rd session of the Committee, and has reiterated this concern ([Decision 34COM 7B.100](#); [Decision 35COM 7B.110](#)).

In 2012, the World Heritage Committee stated (in [Decision 36COM 7B.88](#)), that it:

“4. Notes with concern the findings of the ICOMOS Advisory Mission that the tower has a highly negative visual impact on the setting of the property and thus on its context and relationship to the river and other buildings which support its attributes that convey Outstanding Universal Value.”

As per this same decision, the State Party of Spain offered to host a meeting on historic urban landscapes and contemporary architecture. This meeting will take place end of March 2013.

Colonial City of Santo Domingo (Dominican Republic)

Type of site: Historic city; Threats: Development project – high-rise building

In February 2009, information was received on a large scale high-rise urban development project known as “Sans Souci”, on the opposite bank of the river that had been planned to revitalize the ancient military area facing the colonial centre of Santo Domingo. The intervention foresaw a marine construction along the fortifications and entertainment installations, urban areas and a destination port for international cruise ships.

The World Heritage Centre and the Advisory Bodies expressed their extreme concern to the World Heritage Committee at its 33rd session in 2009 about the proposed Sans Souci development project in the immediate vicinity of the property; and reminded the State Party about its obligations under Paragraph 172 of the Operational Guidelines to formally notify the World Heritage Committee about “new construction which may affect the Outstanding Universal Value of the property”. Considering that this project had the potential to impact adversely on the visual integrity of the property and also through the proposed extreme increase in visitor number on the physical fabric and overall management of the property, the World Heritage Committee requested the State Party “to submit to the World Heritage Centre a complete technical documentation of the project; to withhold any approval of the development until the World Heritage Committee had had the opportunity to fully review the project, and to invite a reactive monitoring mission to consider the possible impact of the Sans Souci project on the OUV and integrity of the property” ([Decision 33 COM 7B.135](#)).

In 2010, the State Party submitted information on the Sans Souci project as requested by the Committee and the reactive monitoring mission was carried out in December 2009. The State Party stated that the project was in the phase of requesting permits and had already received the approval from the Ministry of the Environment and Natural Resources and was waiting for the approval for land use to be emitted by the Department of Urban Planning at the Municipality of Santo Domingo East. The mission comprehensively examined the Sans Souci project as requested by the Committee and noted that Sans Souci was not a single project but was constituted by three well-defined components: cruise port, tourism marina and the real estate project. Out of those three components, the mission considered that the real-estate one constituted a major threat to the Outstanding Universal Value of the property

because of the urbanization proposal and the typology and density of use foreseen in the project, including a corporate building 50 stories high and eleven skyscrapers 30-40 stories high to be located approximately 600-800 meters from the Colonial City, hence breaking the value of Santo Domingo as a group with attributes that follow an urban grid pattern of low and similar height. The World Heritage Committee, at its 34th session in 2010, expressed its “deep concern about the potential developments planned at the vicinity of the property and urged the State Party to stop the proposed Sans Souci real estate development project and consider, in collaboration with the heritage authorities, alternative designs that take into account the conservation of the attributes that sustain the Outstanding Universal Value of the property”. It also urged the State Party to “halt future developments foreseen in the buffer zone, mainly affecting the area of Santo Domingo East, that could impact adversely on the Outstanding Universal Value” (**Decision 34 COM 7B.108**).

In 2011, the World Heritage Committee was informed by the State Party that it was willing to implement the required measures regarding the Sans Souci Real Estate Development Project, to avoid inscribing the property on the List of World Heritage in Danger. According to the Municipality of Santo Domingo East, no changes in the height regulations had yet been made. The regulations for this sector would be established by the Ministry of Culture and the Municipality of the Colonial City.

The World Heritage Committee reiterated its request to submit information on an “*alternative designs for the Sansouci project which take into account the scale of the inscribed property and the impacts that the urban and touristic development may have on the conservation of the attributes that sustain its OUV*”, as well as a progress on the definition of height regulations for Santo Domingo East, taking into account the OUV of the property. It also requested the State Party to halt “future developments foreseen in the buffer zone, mainly affecting the area of Santo Domingo East that could impact adversely on the property” (**Decision 35 COM 7B.123**). The World Heritage Committee will examine the state of conservation of this property at its forthcoming 37th session in Phnom Penh, Cambodia (16-27 June 2013).

Historic Areas of Istanbul (Turkey)

Type of site: Historic City Centre; Threat: Bridge construction/High-rise buildings

The visual integrity of the Historic Areas of Istanbul has been exposed on more than one occasion. High-rise buildings on the western side of the Bosphorus, and the proposed construction of a bridge across the Golden Horn with tall pylons, threatened to obstruct the characteristic skyline of the city’s historic quarter. The bridge in particular (known as the Golden Horn Bridge) has the potential to damage the visual integrity of the property. It is designed to connect two of Istanbul’s metro stations across the Golden Horn and its support pillars obstruct the view of historic buildings. In addition to this, several historic buildings within the buffer zone are being demolished to make way for newer construction projects.

In 2008, ICOMOS and the World Heritage Centre carried out a joint mission and concluded that the Golden Horn Bridge, if completed, would negatively affect the visual integrity of the property. In 2009, during the 33rd session of the World Heritage Committee, concern was expressed over the impact of this development ([Decision 33COM 7B.124](#)). The following year, the Committee reiterated this concern, stating in [Decision 34COM 7B.102](#) that it:

“12. Considers that the proposed construction project for a metro bridge with towering cable-stay structures across the Golden Horn might have the potential to irreversibly impact on the Outstanding Universal Value and integrity of the property, in accordance with Paragraph 179 (b) of the Operational Guidelines;

13. Notes furthermore that an Independent Environmental Impact Assessment has been commissioned by the State Party in accordance with Decision 33 COM 7B.124, to be carried out using the methodology of the "ICOMOS Guidance on Heritage Impact Assessments for Cultural World Heritage Properties" document so as to ensure the safeguarding of the Outstanding Universal Value of the property, in particular on the setting of the Süleymaniye Mosque and on the overall skyline of the historic peninsula”

Further mentions of the Golden Horn Bridge were made in 2010 ([34COM 7B.102](#)) and 2011 ([Decision 35COM 7B.111](#)). Most recently, at the 36th session of the World Heritage Committee, it was stated in [Decision 36COM 7B.89](#) that:

“4. Regrets that, according to the information received, no further mitigation measures to the negative visual impact of the proposed Golden Horn Bridge have so far been proposed beyond those already announced by the State Party and examined by the Committee in 2011, and that, as construction work has progressed, no further structural changes are possible;

5. Considers that the Bridge, as currently being constructed, will have an overall negative impact on the Outstanding Universal Value of the property, and urges the State Party to pursue, as a matter of urgency, any further possible work to mitigate the negative visual impact of the proposed Bridge such as through changes to color and lighting, and to discuss emerging proposals with the World Heritage Centre and the Advisory Bodies;

6. Requests the State Party to invite an urgent joint World Heritage Centre/ICOMOS reactive monitoring mission to assess progress in mitigating the visual impacts of the proposed Golden Horn Bridge, to consider proposed renewal and conservation projects, as well as progress with the overall strategic management of the property, and to assess the overall state of conservation of the property;....

10. Also commends the proposals to develop a Silhouette Master Plan for the Historic Peninsula that will lead to a definition of the silhouette and appropriate height controls...”

Mosi-oa-Tunya / Victoria Falls (Zambia / Zimbabwe)

Type of site: Natural transboundary; Threats: Impacts of tourism/visitor/recreation; Tourism accommodation developments;

In 2006, the World Heritage Committee reviewed the state of conservation of this property due to some concerns regarding its visual integrity. A mission was requested and visited the property in November 2006. It found that continuing developmental pressures within and adjacent to the property were adversely impacting the property on its values and integrity (including plan for a hotel and country club, and a highflier balloon).

In 2007, even though the State Party of Zambia had halted its development projects (hotel and tethered balloon), the World Heritage Committee expressed its concern about uncontrolled urban development, unplanned tourism development and noise, amongst other threats, which continued to threaten the integrity of the property. It also urged the two States Parties to adopt a “complete moratorium on the construction and development of all tourism infrastructure, facilities or services within the World Heritage property” (**Decision 31 COM 7B.4**).

In 2008, the World Heritage Committee was informed by the States parties that a Joint Ministerial Committee has been established and the joint management plan approved, the moratorium on development has now been lifted. Development of tourism facilities will be restricted to the Low Ecologically Sensitive Zone after going through an Environmental Impact Assessment. The States Parties however reported a number of planned developments including construction of ablution blocks, completion of a car park, extension of administration offices and the curio centre, and improved signage.

Considering that tourism planning continues to be a challenge due to rapidly increasing visitation over the last three years in Zambia, the World Heritage Committee noted “with concern the challenges and threats to the integrity of the property, in particular from urban development” (**Decision 32 COM 7B.4**). Besides the attention being paid by both States Parties to the issue of uncontrolled development, in 2010, IUCN received information indicating continued visual intrusion of telephone towers and hotel developments on the Zambian side of the Falls. Telephone towers could indeed be seen from all vantage points on the Zimbabwean side of the property, and hotel roofs and other developments on the Zambian shore also created impacts and could have been better camouflaged. A private company also sent a letter to the Government of Zambia proposing to revive the tethered balloon project at an alternative site close to the property.

The World Heritage Committee reiterated the conclusion of the 2006 mission that “any tethered balloon projects close to the property will adversely impact its visual integrity, because when raised the balloon is likely to appear within the viewing corridor of the falls” (**Decision 34 COM 7B.6**).

At its last session in 2012, the World Heritage Committee noted the measures taken by the States Parties to halt any further development of hotels and other tourist facilities on the river banks and islands; to reduce noise and river pollution and to maintain the site’s visual integrity and natural unspoilt beauty. In its decision, the World Heritage Committee also noted that the State Party of Zambia had submitted three environmental project briefs to the World Heritage Centre, including for a tethered balloon project adjacent to the property, and reiterated” its previous conclusion at its 34th session (Brasilia, 2010) that any tethered balloons close to the property will adversely impact its visual integrity, and urges the States Parties not to authorize any tethered balloon or other tall structures within the vicinity of the falls” (**Decision 36 COM 7B.7**). Finally, the Committee also welcomed “the voluntary agreement of the State Party of Zambia to introduce a limit on the dry-season diversion of water from the falls for hydro-electric power generation, which would significantly restore a major attribute of the Outstanding Universal Value of the property”, the former level of water abstraction clearly affecting the visual impact and aesthetic value of the property.

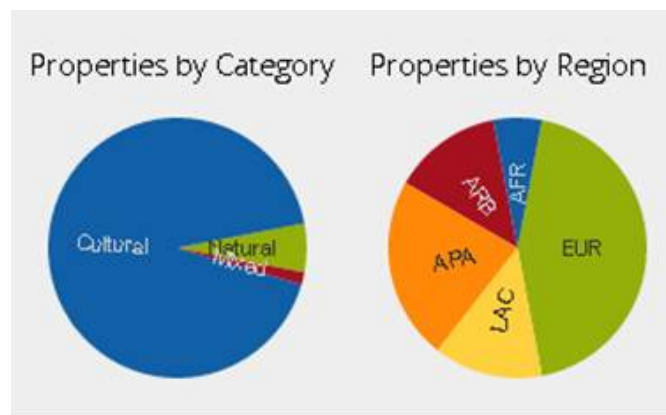
4. Overall Analysis and statistics on “visual integrity” and state of conservation reports

As can be seen from the above debates and decisions, the term “visual integrity” has been used by the World Heritage Committee over time at many occasions, although the term is not defined by the *Operational Guidelines*. Furthermore, other terms such as visual impacts on the historic urban landscape were used and specific requests for a Visual Impact assessment or a Visual Impact Study were made.

Between 2004 and 2012, 120 state of conservation reports raising issues and questions related to “visual integrity” were examined by the World Heritage Committee at its ordinary sessions. These reports cover a total of 66 properties, located in 50 States Parties and distributed as follows:

Cultural properties	92%
Mixed properties	2%
Natural properties	6%

Africa	6%
Arab States	14%
Asia and the Pacific	23%
Europe and North America	44%
Latin America and the Caribbean	14%



To know more about those reports and read the full texts, you can access the World Heritage Centre' **State of conservation Information System** by clicking [here](#)

5. Other debates by the World Heritage Committee related to “visual integrity”

Following the intense discussions on the case of the Historic Centre of Vienna, the **Vienna Memorandum** was developed and was adopted by the International Conference “World Heritage and Contemporary Architecture - Managing the Historic Urban Landscape” (2005, Vienna, Austria). It was welcomed by the 29th session of the World Heritage Committee (Decision 29 COM 5D). The Vienna Memorandum was seen as a key statement for an integrated approach linking contemporary architecture, sustainable urban development and landscape integrity based on existing historic patterns, building stock and context. It especially dealt with historic cities already inscribed or proposed for inscription on the UNESCO World Heritage List, as well as to larger cities that have World Heritage monuments and sites within their urban territories.

Concerned by the multitude of World Heritage Cities facing difficulties in reconciling conservation and development, the World Heritage Committee at its 29th session in Durban, South Africa (July 2005) requested the development of a new standard-setting instrument to provide updated guidelines to better integrate urban heritage conservation into strategies of socio-economic development. The World Heritage Committee relegated this task to UNESCO in view of the fact that such challenges were faced by all historic cities, not only those inscribed onto the World Heritage List, to muster the broadest possible support from the international community, and to underline the role of UNESCO as standard-setting organization.

On 10 November 2011 UNESCO's General Conference adopted the new **Recommendation on the Historic Urban Landscape** by acclamation, the first such instrument on the historic environment issued by UNESCO in 35 years. The Recommendation on the Historic Urban

Landscape will not replace existing doctrines or conservation approaches; rather, it is an additional tool to integrate policies and practices of conservation of the built environment into the wider goals of urban development in respect of the inherited values and traditions of different cultural contexts. This tool is to be implemented by Member States on a voluntary basis. In order to facilitate implementation, the UNESCO General Conference recommended that Member States take the appropriate steps to: adapt this new instrument to their specific contexts; disseminate it widely across their national territories; facilitate implementation through formulation and adoption of supporting policies; and to monitor its impact on the conservation and management of historic cities.

It further recommended that Member States and relevant local authorities identify within their specific contexts the critical steps to implement the Historic Urban Landscape approach, which may include the following: To undertake comprehensive surveys and mapping of the city's natural, cultural and human resources; To reach consensus using participatory planning and stakeholder consultations on what values to protect for transmission to future generations and to determine the attributes that carry these values; To assess vulnerability of these attributes to socio-economic stresses and impacts of climate change; To integrate urban heritage values and their vulnerability status into a wider framework of city development, which shall provide indications of areas of heritage sensitivity that require careful attention to planning, design and implementation of development projects; To prioritize actions for conservation and development; To establish the appropriate partnerships and local management frameworks for each of the identified projects for conservation and development, as well as to develop mechanisms for the coordination of the various activities between different actors, both public and private.

The Recommendation on the Historic Urban Landscape, including a glossary of definitions can be found at http://portal.unesco.org/en/ev.php-URL_ID=48857&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html

6. Tools to assess “visual integrity” and the protection of important views

Over the past years tools have been developed to better assess issues related to “visual integrity”. For example the city of Vilnius developed a tool to improve the “Management of visual integrity of the historic city centre. Development of an impact assessment tool and urban planning and management mechanisms: establishment of monitoring viewpoints and development of a 3D GIS city model to assess the impact of high rise buildings and new developments on the World Heritage’s site values”. This can be accessed at <http://whc.unesco.org/uploads/activities/documents/activity-634-48.pdf>

New guidance documents in national legislation and local regulations relating to the protection of World Heritage Sites have been also issued by the British authorities, such as the “Guidance on The Setting of Heritage Assets” (October 2011), or “Conservation Principles – Policies and Guidance for the Sustainable Management of the Historic Environment” (April 2008), both by English Heritage. These documents make more specific the procedure of how to protect aspects of the setting of World Heritage sites, so that their Outstanding Universal Value, integrity, authenticity and significance is not adversely affected by inappropriate change or development (see whc.unesco.org/document/117028).

Specific tools tailored to the World Heritage requirements were developed through the analysis of the cases of Cologne Cathedral and Dresden Elbe Valley (Germany) by the

Institute of Urban Design and Regional Planning at the University of Aachen It provided independent evaluations of changes in urban and landscape contexts at UNESCO World Heritage sites, including to exactly visualize and to assess how planned changes appear in the real world. For this, several investigation steps were identified: *“First, the natural and cultural historical conditions of the relevant World Heritage sites are analyzed. Then, the essential patterns of perception – both traditional and current – are determined. Subsequently, different relevant points of view and viewing corridors of the UNESCO World Heritage sites are examined and documented with digital camera or video recordings. By overlaying of this data with a digital computer model, which was generated with laser scan recordings, so-called scatter-plott, planned constructions can be visualized realistically and with millimetre precision. Through referencing these visualizations to earlier examination steps, it is possible to substantiate precisely, to which extend urban and landscape scenery is altered by the planned building activity. The analysis results are compared with the nomination criteria which determine the unique universal value of the respective World Heritage site and recommendations for the next steps are formulated on this basis.”* (http://arch.rwth-aachen.de/cms/Architektur/Forschung/Forschungsprojekte/Cultural_Heritage/~sha/UNESCO_Welterbestaetten/lidx/1/)

7. Reflections by ICCROM on the notion of authenticity integrity and visual integrity (see separate paper)

8. Further reflections by ICOMOS (see separate paper)

ICOMOS provided Guidance on Heritage Impact Assessments for Cultural World Heritage Properties
(http://www.international.icomos.org/world_heritage/HIA_20110201.pdf)

9. Further reflections by IUCN (see separate paper on criterion vii)

10. Further Reading

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