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**INF.9B: Keynote speech by Ms Christina Cameron and presentations by the World Heritage Centre and the Advisory Bodies**

**SUMMARY**

This document contains the keynote speech by Ms Christina Cameron, former Chairperson of the 14th session of the World Heritage Committee, and the presentations by the World Heritage Centre and the Advisory Bodies prepared on the occasion of the Expert meeting on the concept of outstanding universal value which took place in Kazan, Russian Federation, from 6 to 9 April 2005

*This paper was presented at the Special Expert Meeting of the World Heritage Convention: The Concept of Outstanding universal value  
Kazan, Republic of Tatarstan, Russian Federation*

## **Evolution of the application of “outstanding universal value” for cultural and natural heritage**

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**Canada**

**7 April 2005**

I have been asked to look at how the concept of outstanding universal value has been applied over time for cultural and natural heritage. The core of this discussion centres on two interpretations of that concept: “the best of best” and “representative of the best”. Does outstanding universal value mean the best of the best or does it mean representative of the best? In other words, is outstanding universal value limited to unique sites or does it extend to several sites that represent the same type of property? My role today is to look at that question through the lens of implementing the *World Heritage Convention*. In actual practice – the day-to-day operation of the Convention – how have the Committee and Advisory Bodies interpreted outstanding universal value?

The concept is at the heart of the *World Heritage Convention*. Outstanding universal value occurs ten times in the *Convention* text, including in the preamble and in articles 1 and 2 that define cultural and natural heritage. But the term itself is not defined. The closest one gets to a definition is in article 11.2, which establishes the World Heritage List. The List is to be composed of properties that the Committee “considers as having outstanding universal value in terms of such criteria as it shall have established.”

This leaves the definition of outstanding universal value to the *Operational Guidelines*. The concept is given meaning through the application of 10 assessment criteria. In earlier versions of the *Operational Guidelines*, outstanding universal value is defined as “a select list of the most outstanding properties ... as defined by Articles 1 and 2 of the *Convention* ... [and] interpreted by the Committee by using two sets of criteria”<sup>i</sup>. In the new 2005 *Operational Guidelines*, outstanding universal value is defined as “so exceptional as to transcend national boundaries and to be of common importance for present and future generations of all humanity... The Committee defines the criteria...”<sup>ii</sup>. The common elements of these two definitions are the idea of **selection** (“most outstanding” and “so exceptional”) and the **application of criteria** created by the Committee.

When I first became involved with World Heritage in the mid-1980s, I encountered a certain mythology. Some said that the Advisory Bodies, ICOMOS and IUCN, applied the criteria differently in their recommendations. Some believed, so the myth ran, that ICOMOS leaned towards “representative of the best” and IUCN stayed with “best of the best”. The Committee, so the story goes, followed the advice of the Advisory Bodies and

made designations using different standards for cultural and natural properties. That mythology continues to prevail today.

### **Reality Check**

I would like to challenge that mythology. To do so, I propose to examine the operation of the *Convention* over its first thirty years. When one looks at the track record, are there really different applications of outstanding universal value being applied? To anticipate my conclusion, I hope to illustrate that the definition began at the same place for both cultural and natural sites, and then evolved over time at a different pace for cultural and natural heritage.

In the first five years of the *Convention*, there was a strong tendency to list iconic sites. By iconic, I mean sites that transcend cultural affiliation, sites that are unique and widely known. These properties clearly meet the benchmark of “best of the best”. Their evaluation did not require much by way of comparative context and analysis, since they were unique and famous. The recommendations of the Advisory Bodies were for the most part positive, given that the universal values of the proposals were quite evident. The World Heritage Committee was able to reach a comfortable consensus on their outstanding universal value without the need for comparative studies.

In the first five years, between 20% and 30% of listed sites could be considered iconic. While I invite you to examine the List for yourselves, I offer some examples by way of illustration: Ngorongoro (Tanzania), one of the main sites of early hominid footprints; Memphis and the pyramid fields from Giza to Dahshur (Egypt), one of the seven wonders of the ancient world; Kathmandu Valley (Nepal), crossroads of the great civilizations of Asia; Historic Centre of Rome (Italy), centre of the Roman Republic and Roman Empire, then capital of the Christian world; the Fort and Shalamar Gardens in Lahore (Pakistan), masterpieces from the brilliant Mughal civilization; the Medina of Fez (Morocco), home to the world’s oldest university; Galapagos Islands (Ecuador), a living museum and showcase of evolution; Grand Canyon (USA), the most spectacular gorge in the world; Great Barrier Reef (Australia), the world’s largest collection of coral reefs; and Serengeti (Tanzania), whose great plains thunder with the annual migrations of gazelles, zebras and wildebeests.

These early examples would likely meet the definition from the *Operational Guidelines* of “most outstanding” or “so exceptional”<sup>iii</sup>.

If we can agree on that starting point, it is clear that something changed. If outstanding universal value began as the “best of the best”, it soon began to shift towards “representative of the best”. Perhaps it was the surprising popularity of the *Convention*, witnessed by the speed with which States Parties signed on, or the rapid growth in proposed inscriptions. Whatever the cause, by the mid-1980s the Committee was expressing concerns about the meaning of outstanding universal value.

The Committee began to hesitate over the values of certain properties and deferred them, pending comparative studies to put them in context. I can recall a lengthy discussion in 1987 over the United Kingdom's proposal for New Lanark. What emerged in the discussion were the Committee's lack of knowledge of industrial heritage and its inability to make a decision. The site was deferred.

That same year, the Committee set up a working group to "review the ways and means of ensuring a rigorous application of the criteria established by the Committee". The next year, 1988, the Committee supported the creation of a Global Study, described as a sort of "international tentative list to assist States Parties and the Committee in evaluating nominations". This Global Study was a complex framework of different parameters: chronological, geographical, functional, social, religious and so forth. It was undoubtedly naïve to believe that all cultural phenomena could be squeezed into a static global framework. Pilot studies on three civilizations – Greco-Hellenistic, Roman and Byzantine – revealed significant weaknesses. Not only did the studies identify a high number of potential properties for inscription; but arguments also began about the need to have at least one site per country to represent each period.

It would appear that the shift towards representivity manifested itself earlier in the cultural field, probably due to the large number of sites being proposed under cultural criteria, and to the inherent complexities of cultural diversity. But if the move towards representivity began earlier in the cultural field, it was also occurring – admittedly less frequently – for natural sites in the 1980s. I can recall Committee fatigue and uncertainty at the number of volcanic island sites being recommended by IUCN in this period.

### **World Heritage Strategic Plan (1992)**

The concern with maintaining rigour in the application of outstanding universal value was a key issue for the World Heritage Strategic Plan, approved by the Committee in Sante Fe on the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the *Convention* in 1992. In the two years of discussion leading up to the final plan, concerns were expressed and debated about "debasement of the coinage" of World Heritage. There was a perception that the standards were being lowered and that recent World Heritage Sites fell below the benchmark of outstanding universal value. Goal 2 in the Strategic Plan specifically called for refining and updating the criteria, and maintaining objective and consistent evaluation procedures.

The second issue that is inextricably linked to the first was the deep unhappiness about the imbalance of sites on the World Heritage List. Analysis showed that the List had many examples from the European region and Christian religious architecture, while lacking sites from other regions and other religious architecture. There were also few sites from sectors like modern architecture, industrial sites, rural landscapes and canals, to name but a few.

## **Global Strategy (1994)**

The Global Strategy grew out of the Strategic Plan of 1992. Embedded in thinking around imbalances on the World Heritage List was the belief that the List needed to be representative if it was to be credible. Those experts working on the Global Strategy were directed to develop a dynamic thematic framework that would be free from cultural bias – probably not a realistic goal – in order to encourage nominations from cultures, regions and typologies not well represented on the List.

The Global Strategy, adopted by the Committee in 1994, was initially focused on cultural properties. Unlike the sterile and static Global Study of a few years earlier, the Global Strategy was a dynamic open-ended process, based on broad categories of universal application. These broad categories, under the heading of “human coexistence with the land” and “human beings in society”,<sup>iv</sup> were well aligned with the innovative work being done on the concept of cultural landscapes at that period. The Global Strategy was meant to encourage a wide range of nominations from diverse cultures and regions of the world.

One can argue that the Global Strategy had a second element that hard-wired the concept of “representative of the best” into the system. The Global Strategy went beyond the two broad categories and identified some specific theme studies that ICOMOS and other academic communities were encouraged to undertake on a priority basis. These themes included modern architecture and industrial complexes. This thematic approach is, in fact, an acceptance that there will be representative sites. A thematic approach opens the door to “representative selection of the best”. The question is, does this still meet the definition of “most outstanding” and “so exceptional”?

An additional consideration is the scope of a theme. On the one hand, a theme may be defined very broadly and few sites would emerge as potential World Heritage Sites. On the other hand, themes may be defined narrowly, paving the way for inferior site proposals.

I can offer a Canadian example. As we worked towards preparing our new Tentative List, proponents of a proposal to include the Warehouse district of Winnipeg chose to narrow the theme to a commercial district representing a railway-based inland gateway city. This meant that only 13 other cities -- 9 of them in the mid-western part of North America -- were considered as comparative examples. Because the theme was defined too narrowly, Canada did not retain this proposal.

Let us take the field of architecture. There is arguably a universal language of architecture with identifiable forms, materials and attributes. Below that, there is a subset of modern architecture, with its own distinct forms, materials and attributes. Below that, there are regional subsets of modern architecture with their own forms, materials and attributes.

If we review two World Heritage Sites that were inscribed for values of modern architecture, we can see a difference. The two sites are the city of Brasilia (1987) in

Brazil, and the Luis Barragan house in Mexico (2004). In the case of Brasilia, it was presented as an outstanding example on a global scale of modern architecture and planning. In the case of the Barragan house, it was discussed as the most influential modernist house in the Latin American region. These are different interpretations of outstanding universal value.

While it is clear that the Global Strategy began by focusing on cultural sites, natural sites soon followed suite. Taking its cue from the Global Strategy, and as a basis for improving global comparative studies, IUCN developed and applied two tools. The first was the Udvardy classification system based on biogeographical realms, biomes and provinces. The second was the initiation of global theme studies on wetlands, mountains, boreal forests, and so on. Like the cultural thematic studies, there is an assumption that natural thematic studies will identify the sites that could round out representation of this category on the World Heritage List.

As an example, the recent experts meeting on boreal forests identified 26 boreal forest sites with potential to be listed as World Heritage, even though several examples of this global phenomenon are already on the List, such as Wood Buffalo National Park (Canada), Virgin Komi Forests (Russia), and the Laponian Area (Sweden). This definitely signals a change in interpreting outstanding universal value. The introduction to the workshop report underscores a bias towards representativity by stating that boreal forests are “one of the biome types with relatively low coverage on the World Heritage List”. Does this not point to an evolving understanding of both the notion and the assessment of outstanding universal value?

Incidentally, this issue was at the heart of the tense Committee debate in China, over the proposal to inscribe the Pitons in St. Lucia. IUCN recommended against inscription, arguing that lava domes like the ones at the Pitons could be found in many other areas, including existing World Heritage Sites, and that their scenic qualities were significant at a regional level, but did not meet the benchmark of outstanding universal value. The Committee did not agree with IUCN’s recommendation and inscribed the site anyway. By adding the Pitons to the World Heritage List, the Committee was de facto taking the position that outstanding universal value can have regional manifestations.

It is interesting to compare the sampling from the first five years of the List, when many iconic sites were inscribed, with the last five years, where there is a marked tendency to non-iconic sites. Only about 5% of the sites inscribed in the last five years might be considered iconic. I cite as an example the Central Amazon site (Brazil), one of the planet’s richest regions in terms of biodiversity.

### **Infinite number of Themes**

The Global Strategy has encouraged and nurtured a thematic approach. When this approach is used, a logical consequence is an infinite number of possible theme studies, depending on how the category is framed. The parameters of the themes are critical. The challenge is the breadth or narrowness of the defined category.

Could it be that the tools used to introduce better science and rigour in comparative assessments introduce by their very nature a bias towards representivity? What is clear is that the thematic approach is here to stay, that the scope of any thematic study can be broad or narrow, and that theme studies will identify more and more potential nominations. What is not clear is where the cut off is or should be to meet the benchmark of outstanding universal value.

### **Does it matter?**

This brings us to a final question: does it matter if there is a threshold for outstanding universal value? Can or should the World Heritage List be capped? Is there a natural cut off? Intellectually, yes. But it depends on the definition of outstanding universal value. The heart of the *Convention* is about protection and international cooperation. How deep does the Committee wish to go in protecting heritage sites? If deeper, then it is inevitable that the definition of outstanding universal value will continue to drift towards sites that are “representative of the best”.

But it is important to note that there is another dimension to the *Convention*. One of the pressures for World Heritage listing is the perception that, if a site is not on the World Heritage List, it will not be protected. This is the “World Heritage or nothing” syndrome. Clearly, this is untrue. Article 5 of the *Convention* focuses on State Parties’ activities in their own countries. Article 5 calls for strengthening and supporting national efforts to protect heritage sites and encourages national programmes as a complement to international efforts. Perhaps the pressures on World Heritage could be relieved by stronger national activities as well as greater linkages with other international designation processes, like the lists for fossil sites, Ramsar sites and Biosphere reserves. Taken together, these interlocking pieces could in fact create greater momentum for a global culture of conservation.

We know there is a waiting list of over 1,500 sites on existing Tentative Lists. How many of these sites will eventually be listed as World Heritage depends on the States Parties to the *Convention*. The Global Strategy has created a framework that supports ongoing identification and designation for the foreseeable future. Any change in direction, any tightening of the definition of outstanding universal value, can only come from the States Parties themselves. Raising the threshold for World Heritage designation may come, if States Parties believe that the number of sites is unmanageable, or if the economic advantage of being in the exclusive World Heritage club has been compromised by sheer numbers, or if international funding partners complain that they can no longer sort out priorities for investment.

In the meantime, the interpretation of outstanding universal value for both cultural and natural sites will continue to shift towards a definition of “representative of the best”. It is too late to limit the List to the “best of the best”. This approach brings benefits to countries in areas of economic and sustainable development, as well as in national pride and cultural identity. As long as these benefits remain, States Parties will continue to

nominate sites and the Committee presumably will continue to inscribe them on the World Heritage List. One can only hope that, in the context of “representative of the best”, the Advisory Bodies and the Committee manage to keep the bar high enough to retain the World Heritage cachet.

Maybe it does not matter. Maybe what matters is that the objectives of the *World Heritage Convention* – protection and international cooperation – continue to be the catalyst for increased national actions to support a culture of conservation.

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<sup>ii</sup> Old Ogs: The Convention provides for the protection of those cultural and natural properties<sup>1</sup> deemed to be of outstanding universal value. It is not intended to provide for the protection of all properties of great interest, importance or value, but only for **a select list of the most outstanding of these from an international viewpoint**. The outstanding universal value of cultural and natural properties is defined by [Articles 1](#) and [2](#) of the Convention. These definitions are interpreted by the Committee by using two sets of criteria: one set for cultural property and another set for natural property. The criteria and the conditions of authenticity or integrity adopted by the Committee for this purpose are set out in paragraphs [24](#) and [44](#) below.

<sup>ii</sup> 49 Outstanding universal value means cultural and/or natural significance which is **so exceptional as to transcend national boundaries** and to be of common importance for present and future generations of all humanity. As such, the permanent protection of this heritage is of the highest importance to the international community as a whole. The Committee defines the criteria for the inscription of properties on the World Heritage List. ”

<sup>iii</sup> This analysis does not take into account the likelihood that iconic sites will be among the first nominated after a State Party joins the Convention. For example, China signed in December 1985 and nominated the Great Wall and Imperial Palaces in 1987; Russia signed in October 1988 and nominated the Kremlin and Red Square in 1990.

<sup>iv</sup> Human coexistence with the land included: movement of peoples, settlement, modes of subsistence, and technological evolution; human beings in society included human interaction, cultural coexistence and spiritual/creative expression. Global Strategy, 1994.



***World Heritage Conservation  
and outstanding universal value***

By Dr. Mechtild Rössler  
**UNESCO World Heritage Centre**

Powerpoint Presentation at the:

*Special Expert Meeting of the World Heritage Convention:  
The Concept of Outstanding Universal Value*

Municipality of Kazan, Republic of Tatarstan, the Russian Federation, 6-9 April 2005

First of all I would like to thank the President of this session for his kind words and the Kazan Municipality and the Russian authorities for their warm welcome to all participants.

On behalf of my colleagues from the World Heritage Centre with whom I have prepared the background document<sup>1</sup>, I would like to make this presentation from the perspective of the Secretariat of the *World Heritage Convention* (1972); serving the States Parties, natural and cultural heritage institutions, the site managers, the experts, the general public – and last but not least – the World Heritage Committee.

The title “World Heritage Conservation and outstanding universal value” already gives you one of the key points of this perspective, which is the conservation of the unique and outstanding heritage of humankind – at the origin and heart of the *World Heritage Convention*. The background document distributed to you attempts to provide an accurate account of all past developments, discussions and decisions on the issues at stake at present; in addition I would like to provide you with some more inputs based on the 15 years experience working with this *Convention*.

The World Heritage Committee at its 28th session provided this expert meeting with a clear mandate and four tasks:

- 1: Understanding of the concept of outstanding universal value under the *World Heritage Convention*
- 2: Towards a better identification of World Heritage properties of potential outstanding universal value and a better preparation of Tentative Lists
- 3: Improving nominations of properties of potential outstanding universal value to the World Heritage List

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<sup>1</sup> Anne Lemaistre, Lodovico Folin Calabi and Fumiko Ohinata.

#### 4: Towards Sustainable conservation of World Heritage properties of outstanding universal value.

However, even the Committee in July 2004 realized that this was a complex and challenging assignment which may be impossible to achieve... and therefore we found it necessary to provide you with more input and background reflections.

The *Convention* is a holistic document, an outstanding response to the universal nature of heritage to biological and cultural diversity, as the experts in Amsterdam, The Netherlands (1998) pointed out. The *Convention* is a unique document which allows for an evolution of the interpretation of heritage, as it defines natural and cultural heritage (Articles 1 and 2) in a very broad way. At the same time it links the global, national and local level of heritage protection (Articles 4, 5 and 6), its function in the life of the community (Article 5) and includes a long-term perspective (Article 4) and purpose of heritage preservation, namely for future generations.

It also states, but does not define outstanding universal value (Preamble, Articles 1, 2, 11.2 and 12). However, looking at the notion of outstanding universal value, it must be underlined that the Convention was not the only document adopted by UNESCO's General Conference on 16 November 1972: *The Recommendation concerning the Protection, at National Level, of the Cultural and Natural Heritage* was also adopted on the same day, and as Titchen<sup>2</sup> pointed out, the two documents need to be seen together, as one protects properties of "outstanding universal value" and the other cultural and natural heritage of special value. With the increasing recognition and nearly universal ratification of the *World Heritage Convention*, the Recommendation was forgotten.

Ms Cameron in her paper for this meeting has already highlighted some issues in the evolution of the implementation of the *World Heritage Convention*. I would like to emphasize the following landmark activities which illustrate conceptual development and evolution of the interpretation of the *Convention*:

- the definition of the criteria in the first *Operational Guidelines* in 1978, which provided for the first interpretation of the *Convention's* definition of natural and cultural heritage; subsequently they were regularly revised to accommodate major new evolutions<sup>3</sup>;
- the 1992 Strategic Orientations prepared at the occasion of the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the *Convention*; at the same time, when the cultural landscapes concept was introduced and major changes to natural criteria occurred;

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<sup>2</sup> Sarah Titchen, On the construction of "outstanding universal value". Some comments on the implementation of the 1972 UNESCO *World Heritage Convention*. In: Conservation and Management of Archaeological Sites, Vol. 1, No. 4. 1996, 235.

<sup>3</sup> The term biodiversity for example did not exist in 1972 or 1978, but was introduced both into the natural heritage criteria (Paragraph 44 of the *Operational Guidelines* 1993) and into the interpretation of the interaction between people and the natural environment under the newly introduced cultural landscape categories: "The continued existence of traditional forms if land-use supports biological diversity in many regions of the world." (Paragraph 39 of the *Operational Guidelines* 2002; now Annex 3 of the 2005 version).

- the 2002 Budapest Declaration at the occasion of the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the *Convention*;
- and finally the 2005 *Operational Guidelines* published at the end of a extensive revision process, which was based on many expert group recommendations and related Committee decisions (2000-2004).

In addition to these, I also see a major evolution with new concepts being developed in the growth phase of the *Convention* in the 1990s, as well as new cooperation with existing and new international instruments, mainly the biodiversity related Conventions<sup>4</sup>.

Another important aspect of the *Convention* with regard to outstanding universal value is the transmission to future generations: “All nations possess the right to use and benefit from World Heritage... but cannot destroy that heritage because it is a legacy whose transmission to future generations must not be compromised under any circumstances”.<sup>5</sup>

This legacy means therefore one of intergenerational equity and it is the transmission of the outstanding universal value of the property/ies which is of fundamental importance here. We transmit at the same time values from one generation to the other, and share them on a global scale, between different regions, cultures and environments.

I had the privilege to work with the “founding fathers” of the *World Heritage Convention*, Michel Batisse and Gerard Bolla, who published in 2003 an account of their adventures to get the *World Heritage Convention* into its final text for adoption by UNESCO’s General Conference:

*« La Convention, quand bien même la liste serait allongée indéfiniment, - ce qui la priverait bientôt de toute signification – est censée se concentrer sur ce que l’on considère comme étant exceptionnel. <sup>6</sup>»*

Both of them actually saw outstanding universal value as the key to a select World Heritage List<sup>7</sup>.

If we now move to the implementation of the *Convention* over time, we can see the exceptional global response: we have a nearly global coverage with 180 States Parties having prepared 144 Tentative Lists and 788 existing World Heritage properties. Furthermore, we have a considerable growth rate with the Committee inscribing between

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<sup>4</sup> This evolution can also be seen with the role of the *Convention* at the World Parks Congress 2003 (Durban South Africa), where World Heritage was a transversal stream through the Congress. A publication of the results is in print.

<sup>5</sup> B. von Droste, The World Heritage strategy – future directions. Parks Vol. 7, No. 2, June 1997:14.

<sup>6</sup> M. Batisse: L’invention du Patrimoine mondial. UNESCO, Paris : AAFU 2003, p.41

<sup>7</sup> This was further confirmed by Ms Anne Raidl (in charge of the World Heritage Secretariat in the Culture Sector until 1991), who underlined the importance of Tentative Lists as a global selection mechanism. On Tentative Lists as a planning tool see also Titchen, S. and M. Rössler: Tentative Lists as a Tool for Landscape Classification and Protection. In: Rössler, M., Plachter, H. and B. v. Droste (eds.), Cultural Landscapes of Universal Value. Components of a Global Strategy. Jena: Fischer Verlag, 1995, 420-427.

20 and 40 new properties per year. This huge development mainly in the 1990s illustrates the challenges of linking global and local values, the relationship between universality and representivity.

These issues were actually taken up by previous international expert's meetings, including Paris (1994), La Vanoise (1996), Amsterdam (1998) and Amsterdam (2003)<sup>8</sup>.

The main challenge, the (growing) imbalance of the World Heritage List which can be seen in Table 1, led to Regional Action Plans following the Global Strategy (1994), which provided for the "anthropological turn" in the World Heritage work. It also led to a number of specific decisions of the World Heritage Committee to broaden access to the Committee and to restrict the number of nominations by States Parties per year (Cairns 2000, Suzhou 2004) as well as the overall number of sites to be examined to reduce the heavy workload of the UNESCO World Heritage Centre, the Advisory Bodies and the World Heritage Committee itself.

A more detailed analysis reveals a number of other challenges, such as the artificial division of the world, where the whole Northern Hemisphere (Europe and North America) were put together as one region.

However, on the positive side we have quite a number of World Heritage best practice examples and tremendous experience which can be shared between the different regions and among all partners which I would like to highlight:

### **Tentative Lists**

Much progress has been achieved already in the better preparation of Tentative Lists. Best practice examples of such lists are those by the United Kingdom (1999), Canada (2003) or Mexico (2004). Some States Parties, including Madagascar or Uruguay have also prepared comprehensive national inventories, which constitute the basis for a sound framework for selecting sites of potential outstanding universal value.

We have also seen increased regional cooperation, partly as a result of Periodic Reporting, but also for the harmonization of Tentative Lists, such as the Nordic Countries (1996), the Caucasian countries (2002), the Baltic Region (2003), or Central America (2004) to name only a few. The main issue which needs to be addressed is the implementation of the recommendations from such regional exercises.

### **World Heritage Nominations**

Many comparative studies and analyses have been carried out and we should also not forget the coordination with other international and regional instruments. For example, the Council of Europe commissioned a study on geological heritage explicitly looking at the World Heritage List and then decided to make a Recommendation on European Geological Heritage. Both the Centre and the Advisory Body IUCN, have been involved

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<sup>8</sup> For detailed references see Background Paper.

in this process with the aim to assist in identifying and protecting geological, paleontological and fossil heritage in this region.

Also many specific expert meetings were held on themes and categories such as Forests (Berastagi 1998, St Petersburg 2003, Nancy 2005), Karst (Vietnam 2001, Slovenia 2004) or the Marine Policy Workshop: *Applying the World Heritage Convention to the Conservation of Outstanding Marine Ecosystems* (2004); the same is also true for a thematic approach for a number of meetings on cultural heritage, particularly cultural landscapes (acknowledging that there are many different types of cultural landscapes in all regions and the need for guidance by the World Heritage Committee for a selective approach).

In this context I would like to stress that some of these meetings were triggered by nominations which failed. Furthermore, it needs to be understood that nominations were (and are) often the results of long-term projects not directly visible at the next Committee session. More importantly, these projects and expert meetings place the *Convention* alongside other international conservation instruments, mainly the biodiversity related Conventions<sup>9</sup>, but also cultural heritage instruments such as the European Landscape Convention (Florence 2000).

Looking back at the past three decades, this is a very important aspect as in 1972 hardly any other global cultural heritage instrument existed, but now we see them emerging or entering into force, such as the 2003 *Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage* or the proposed *Convention on the Protection of the Diversity of Cultural Contents and Artistic Expressions*. The Committee discussed some of these aspects in December 2004.

At the same time, new approaches and new thematic frameworks emerged including the shared heritage of nations, such as the Quapac Nan or Ruta Inca, the Alpine Arc, the Pacific Islands. These new approaches assist States Parties not only in preparing nominations but using a thematic framework for identifying relevant sites and a methodology for preparing appropriate transboundary and transnational cooperation mechanisms.

In addition, the results of the Periodic Reporting exercises could lead to better Tentative Lists, increased harmonization, improved and focused nominations and therefore a more balanced World Heritage List. At the “Reflection Year” foreseen in 2007 on the results of the Periodic Reporting, strength and weaknesses may be reviewed, but also the results of actions taken by the Committee with regard to the Suzhou Decision and the follow-up to this meeting here in Kazan (Tatarstan).

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<sup>9</sup> See for historical evolution John Cormick, *The Global Environmental Movement. Reclaiming Paradise*. London: Belhaven Press 1989 and Brown Weiss, Edith, *In Fairness to Future Generations: International Law, Common Patrimony, and Intergenerational Equity*, Transnational Publishers, 1989.

## **Sustainable conservation**

Moving to the last issues placed on our agenda - sustainable conservation and development. This is crucial to maintain the outstanding universal value of the properties, but at the same time this theme places them in a broader context of culture and society and culture as foundation for development, and even more importantly with regard to the question of long-term survival of humankind with environmental sustainability and the continued existence of key ecosystems to be protected for future generations: “Environmental sustainability requires preserving natural resources in ecosystems essential to support life.”<sup>10</sup>

Some of the sustainable development and conservation aspects were covered by regional programmes for sustainable World Heritage conservation following the Periodic Reporting exercise. But more importantly, sustainable conservation has been taken up not only by broad international discussion during recent years<sup>11</sup>, but also by many on-site projects around the world, including those developed by the World Heritage Centre in partnership with the United Nations Foundation, such as “Enhancing our Heritage: monitoring and managing for success in natural World Heritage sites”.

“Because World Heritage sites are internationally recognized as being of “outstanding universal value” they should be models of effective management.<sup>12</sup>” This link between outstanding universal value, conservation and effective management is the key to some of the discussions and resulting outputs the Committee expects from us.

On behalf of my colleagues I would like to point out that we have strived to provide you with a concise and at the same time substantive background paper. With my presentation we wanted to add some concrete examples to provide you with necessary illustrations for our debates.

We have structured the agenda according to the themes identified by the World Heritage Committee:

- 1: Towards better identification of properties of potential outstanding universal value and preparation of Tentative Lists;
- 2: Improving nominations of properties of potential outstanding universal value;
- 3: Towards sustainable conservation of World Heritage properties.

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<sup>10</sup> E. Salim, Beating the ‘resource curse’, *Our Planet* (UNEP) 15, No. 4, 2005, 30-31.

<sup>11</sup> Culture in Sustainable Development. Investing in Cultural and Natural Endowments. Proceedings of the Conference held at the World Bank, Washington, 28-29 September 1998. Ed by I. Serageldin, J. Martin-Brown, The World Bank 1999.

<sup>12</sup> Jeff Mc Neeley and Bernd von Droste; In: *World Heritage Twenty years Later*. IUCN, Gland, 1992, 10.

Working groups will be established to discuss these issues. Most importantly, these groups provide the setting to have your inputs and in-sights and very valuable on-site and national experience taken account of in the debates. We sincerely hope that we are able to meet the high expectations of the World Heritage Committee.

I wish us all fruitful discussions and that we meet the challenge of the Committee in the best possible way, by learning from each others expertise, listening and producing a concise report for the next Committee session.

In closing, I would like to share with you that I really enjoy participating in these expert meetings and being part of a team to move the interpretation of the *Convention* and the everyday World Heritage conservation forward. I believe that the results of our meeting can reinforce the unique role of the *World Heritage Convention* as a global player, and most importantly contribute to a sustainable future of World Heritage properties.

Thank you very much.



# ICOMOS

The International Council on Monuments and Sites

## *Background Paper*

**SPECIAL EXPERT MEETING OF THE WORLD  
HERITAGE CONVENTION:  
THE CONCEPT OF OUTSTANDING UNIVERSAL VALUE**

**Kazan, Republic of Tartarstan, Russian Federation**

6-9 April 2005



## A. WORLD CULTURAL HERITAGE: DEFINING THE OUTSTANDING UNIVERSAL VALUE

In articles 8, 13 and 14 of the Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage of 1972 ICOMOS, the International Council on Monuments and Sites, is named as advisory body of the World Heritage Committee. As advisory body our guideline in defining the outstanding value of cultural heritage is therefore first and foremost the *World Heritage Convention* which already in the preamble demands the *protection of the cultural and natural heritage of outstanding universal value*.

### Monument Values and the Definition of Cultural Heritage in article 1 of the Convention

The *World Heritage Convention* defines cultural heritage in article 1:  
*For the purpose 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 man, and areas including archaeological sites which are of outstanding universal value from the historical, aesthetic, ethnological or anthropological point of view.*

With this definition of cultural heritage as monuments and sites article 1 of the *World Heritage Convention* sets the requirement of outstanding universal value *from the point of view of history, art or science* when dealing with monuments or groups of buildings and *from the historical, aesthetic, ethnological or anthropological points of view* in connection with sites, while according to article 2 of the Convention natural heritage should meet the requirement of outstanding universal value *from the aesthetic or scientific point of view*.

The Convention thus starts out from a monument definition and from monument values which have been phrased in a similar form in monument protection laws of individual state parties worldwide, i.e. mentioning first the historic value or commemorative value respectively, then the so-called artistic value and further values, such as the ethnological or anthropological significance connected in the

Convention with the term sites. Monuments whose preservation is a matter of public interest because of these values are meant to be protected by national monument protection laws or regional decrees. For this reason they are registered in monument lists as well as in national or regional inventories. This is also a prerequisite for the *inventories of properties forming part of the cultural and natural heritage* as demanded of the state parties in article 11 of the Convention, for only by comparison with already existing cultural heritage and its particular values the outstanding value of individual properties can be determined for a kind of Tentative List. For the necessarily pluralistic approach concerning questions of monument values the system of commemorative and present-day values of the Austrian Alois Riegl (*Modern Cult of Monuments*, 1903) is helpful, that is the definition of values such as age value and historical value, art value and also use value of monuments. By the way, a Cicero commentary from late Antiquity already defines monuments in general as "things reminding of something" (*omnia monumenta dicuntur quae faciunt alicuius rei recordationem*) - a very broad definition emphasising the commemorative value.

#### The Expanded Monument Definition and the Concept of Cultural Diversity

The definition of cultural heritage in article 1 of the Convention can also be interpreted very broadly and must be seen in connection with the monument definition of the Venice Charter, which preceded the Convention and is acknowledged worldwide. *The concept of a historic monument*, reads article 1 of the Venice Charter, *embraces not only the single architectural work but also the urban or rural setting in which is found the evidence of a particular civilization, a significant development or a historic event. This applies not only to great works of art but also to more modest works of the past which have acquired cultural significance with the passing of time.* In this sense and in keeping with the spirit of the Convention the various versions of the Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the *World Heritage Convention* have also interpreted the definitions of article 1 very broadly, for instance "groups of buildings" as different categories of towns, in some monument laws defined as ensembles consisting of monuments, or the "combined works of nature and man" (in the Convention under sites) as cultural landscapes, which are subdivided into three main categories. Incidentally, it goes without saying that in the decades since the *World Heritage Convention* was passed modern society's ideas of "cultural heritage" have expanded considerably, if we only think of the categories of urban or rural ensembles and settings, of cultural landscapes and cultural routes, all categories further developed within the framework of the implementation of the Convention, or of the inclusion of rural settlements and vernacular architecture, of the heritage of the industrial age or of the heritage of the modern age, taking into account that the 20th century has also become history whose works of outstanding universal value need to be represented in a World Heritage List.

But even a considerably expanded definition of cultural heritage is compatible with the definition of article 1 of the Convention, if in accordance with cultural diversity one understands the terms "monuments" and "sites" in all their

diversities. This wealth of cultural heritage and the various values, which can be seen in connection with monuments and sites, are the result of that cultural diversity described in article 1 of the UNESCO Declaration on Cultural Diversity (2001): *Culture takes diverse forms across time and space. This diversity is embodied in the uniqueness and plurality of the identities of the groups and societies making up humankind. As a source of exchange, innovation and creativity, cultural diversity is as necessary for humankind as biodiversity is for nature. In this sense, it is the common heritage of humanity and should be recognized and affirmed for the benefit of present and future generations.*

In view of the fact that the monument definition of the Convention of 1972 can also be applied to modern ideas of cultural diversity the criticism, which started with the "global strategy" of 1994, of the alleged "weaknesses and imbalances" of the Convention and its "almost exclusively 'monumental' concept of the cultural heritage" seems somewhat exaggerated (see Expert Meeting on the "Global Strategy" and thematic studies for a representative World Heritage List, Paris 20-22 June 1994).

#### Global Strategy and Frameworks for the Heritage Identification Process

The main goal of the Global Strategy established in 1994 by the World Heritage Committee was to ensure the future of a more representative, balanced and credible World Heritage List. ICOMOS as advisory body of UNESCO adopted in an analysis of the World Heritage List and Tentative Lists a multiple approach in order to identify possible gaps and underrepresented cultural heritage of outstanding universal value. Following the suggestions of the World Heritage Committee ICOMOS used three complementary axes for this analysis: a typological framework with different categories of cultural heritage, a chronological/regional framework aiming at the world's cultural heritage in time and space, and a thematic framework, allowing for new aspects and contexts to be included in the work on the World Heritage List. The results are presented in our report referring to the representivity of the World Heritage List: *Filling the Gaps - an Action Plan for the Future*, an analysis which was presented to the World Heritage Committee at its session in Suzhou, China, in July 2004. In this report, into which I don't wish to go in depth, ICOMOS has introduced the three complementary approaches to the analyses of the representivity of the World Heritage List in order to ensure that the world heritage of humankind, in all its diversity and complexity, is adequately reflected on the List.

#### Criteria of Outstanding Universal Value

Each identification for the world list of monuments and sites of outstanding universal value in the sense of the Convention means - just as in individual countries the preparation of national or regional monument lists - documentation of monuments and sites or cultural properties on the basis of an evaluation following certain criteria. These criteria, however, may change from time to time and we should be aware of the change of values that this entails. For example, the

so-called artistic value depends to a certain degree on the taste of the time; it is therefore not an absolute but only a relative value. Also in the past decades there have been changes in what the societies of the various regions of the world consider to be important within the chronological/regional framework of the history of humankind. This also finds expression, for instance, in the considerably expanded "modern" definition of monument. While in our time there is a strong dominance of purely economic values, in former times there used to be fierce discussion about cultural value orientation, eg if we think of the famous *querelle des anciens et modernes* of the 17th century in France - the question whether outstanding universal values could only be achieved by imitating the Antiquity or if expressions of the creativity of one's own time were also allowed.

According to the *Oxford Dictionary* "outstanding" means something that *stands out from the rest; prominent, conspicuous, clearly visible, striking to the eye; pre-eminent; remarkable, superior, notable, noteworthy*, and "universal" can be defined as *affecting or including the whole of something specified or implied; existing or occurring everywhere or in all things*. Be that as it may: Outstanding Universal Value means outstanding universal value and in our context it requires clarification only with regard to World Cultural Heritage. The participants of the Global Strategy Natural and Cultural Expert Meeting in Amsterdam (1998) formulated the following definition, which seems to make sense: *The requirement of outstanding universal value should be interpreted as an outstanding response to issues of universal nature common to or addressed by all human cultures. In relation to natural heritage, such issues are seen in biogeographical diversity, in relation to culture in human creativity and resulting cultural processes.*

In any case, the requirement OUV applies only to a small selection from the entire cultural heritage of humankind, based upon comparative analysis. This selection is in fact a much broader approach than the list of the seven wonders of the world from the 3rd century BC, those seven pieces of architecture and art from the age of Antiquity, which appeared "outstanding" because of their size and splendour and which to a certain degree already had universal value. Besides, our World Heritage List, consisting soon of 1000 items, will by no means contain everything which from a different point of view could also be of outstanding universal value: *The fact that a property belonging to the cultural or natural heritage has not been included in either of the two lists mentioned in paragraphs 2 and 4 of Article 11 shall in no way be construed to mean that it does not have an outstanding universal value for purposes other than those resulting from inclusion in these lists* (Article 12 of the Convention).

The requirement of outstanding universal value limits the number of objects on the World Heritage List, this selection thus representing only the tip of the pyramid. It is a selection based upon the enormous wealth and diversity of cultural heritage worldwide. This cultural heritage must not only be protected and preserved for future generation as individual objects of outstanding universal value, but instead in its entirety. The relevant criteria for evaluating the OUV of cultural heritage proposed for inclusion in the World Heritage List can be found in paragraph 24 of the Operational Guidelines, a paragraph with which ICOMOS as advisory body constantly has to deal. It is based on the already quoted definition

of cultural heritage in article 1 of the Convention and the corresponding monument values *from the point of view of history, art or science*, and it is a proven framework for the evaluation of different categories/types of cultural heritage. In all six categories direct or indirect reference to the requirements for outstanding universal value is made: *masterpiece of human genius* (I), *unique or at least exceptional testimony* (III), *outstanding example* (IV, V), *of outstanding universal significance* (VI). While changes to the Convention seem to make little sense and would hardly have a chance of success since it is one of the few highly successful instruments within the framework of world cultural policy, the World Heritage Committee time and again has dealt with corrections to the Operational Guidelines, which however need to respect the spirit of the Convention. The only recently adopted new version of the Operational Guidelines shows some improvements to the old article 24, particularly putting together criteria I-X for the evaluation of the OUV of cultural and natural heritage. This opens up new possibilities for evaluating the OUV of cultural heritage (for instance with regard to the criterion of "integrity", see below), but on the whole changes to these criteria are a delicate matter simply because in the past the majority of the World Cultural Heritage was already listed according to the proven criteria.

#### Authenticity and Integrity

In the *Operational Guidelines* the six criteria mentioned above are connected with the so-called "test of authenticity": *A monument, group of buildings or site which is nominated for inclusion in the World Heritage List will be considered to be of outstanding universal value for the purpose of the Convention when the Committee finds that it meets one or more of the following criteria and the test of authenticity. This test of authenticity in design, material, workmanship or setting and in the case of cultural landscapes their distinctive character and components is just as much a crucial prerequisite for inclusion in the World Heritage List as adequate legal and/or contractual and/or traditional protection and management mechanisms to ensure the conservation of the nominated cultural properties or cultural landscapes.* After all the test of authenticity proves that we are dealing with authentic testimonies of history, i.e. "real" monuments, not surrogates of one kind or the other. The question of authenticity is therefore relevant for the entire cultural heritage, independently of the question whether - in the sense of the Convention - monuments and sites of outstanding universal value are concerned or not. The preamble of the Venice Charter already stressed the common responsibility to safeguard the historic monuments *in the full richness of their authenticity*; however, the Charter did not define the authentic monument values. This was the task of the Nara conference (1994), one of the most important documents of modern conservation theory. The Nara Document tried to define the *test of authenticity in design, material and workmanship* rather comprehensively so that according to the decisive article 13 it explicitly also included the immaterial/intangible values of cultural heritage: *Depending on the nature of the cultural heritage, its cultural context and its evolution through time, authenticity judgements may be linked to the worth of a great variety of sources of*

*information. Aspects of the sources may include form and design, materials and substance, use and function, traditions and techniques, location and setting, and spirit and feeling, and other internal and external factors.* The Nara Document describes the authentic values, including the authentic spirit of monuments and sites, in a much more differentiated way than in the current debate on the rather simple distinction between tangible and intangible values.

Without wanting to go further into the question of authenticity, one more remark concerning the question of integrity: Similar to authenticity for cultural heritage the *conditions of integrity*, explained in detail in the Operational Guidelines, are a precondition for inscription of natural heritage in the World Heritage List. For the inscription of cultural properties "integrity" is not a necessary prerequisite. The walls of a historic ruin or of an archaeological site are surely not in their integrity, i.e. *in the state of being whole or in perfect condition* (Oxford Dictionary), but nonetheless they may very well be authentic in every respect. The term integrity has always been used for the characterisation of certain qualities and values of cultural properties, eg the integrity of a work of art in the sense of immaculateness, intactness, or for instance the territorial integrity of a cultural landscape or the integral, intact surrounding of an architectural monument as a particular value.

Possible questions for discussion:

The newly opened discussion on the topic of OUV at the conference in Kazan could look for answers to various questions, for example:

- Do the ten criteria for OUV named in the Operational Guidelines need to be further developed?
- What about the extent of OUVs within a site: Are all parts of monuments and sites of equal value?
- How to preserve and manage those qualities that give a monument or site its OUV?
- What are the special threats to OUV?
- In the sense of a "classification" of monuments and sites: is the emphasis on OUV in the Convention an opportunity or a threat for the large amount of cultural heritage not inscribed in the World Heritage List?

Michael Petzet  
Paris, 2 April 2005

**B. IDENTIFYING AND ASSESSING OUTSTANDING UNIVERSAL VALUE:  
DISCUSSION POINTS**

The following section considers the concept of Outstanding Universal Value, what the words value, universal and outstanding mean in the context of the *World Heritage Convention*, how cultural qualities may be defined and valued, and how a Statement of Outstanding Universal Value could be constructed. It then goes on to consider the implications of this in terms of cultural diversity, and the need for

a rigorous assessment of Outstanding Universal Value to underpin tentative lists, nominations and management plans. Finally it suggests that further training and capacity building in this process would be highly beneficial.

## 1. Concept of Outstanding Universal Value

The Operational Guidelines for the *World Heritage Convention* refer to

- Monuments .....of *outstanding universal value* from the point of view of history, art or science
- Groups of buildings .....of *outstanding universal value* from the point of view of history, art or science
- Sites .....of *outstanding universal value* from the historical, aesthetic, ethnological or anthropological points of view

Monuments, groups of buildings or sites are considered to be of *outstanding universal value* for the purposes of the Convention when the Committee finds that they meet one or more of the following criteria (and the test of authenticity):

- represent a *masterpiece* of human creative genius
- be an *important* interchange.....
- bear a *unique or at least exceptional* testimony to .....
- be an *outstanding* example of.....
- be associated with ideas, or with beliefs, with artistic and literary works of *outstanding universal significance*.....(extracts from criteria)

Monuments, groups of building, and sites are thus considered to be of Outstanding Universal Value if they are a '*masterpiece*' or are '*important*', '*unique*', '*exceptional*' or '*outstanding*' from the point of view of history, art, science, aesthetics, ethnology, or anthropology.

## 2. Meaning of Value

The word value can be used in two main ways: value may be the equivalent of benefit: it may also mean recognition of worth. The *World Heritage Convention* uses the latter definition: for World Heritage sites, value means some sort of perceived worth.

Value is not something that monuments, groups of buildings or sites possess intrinsically: all value is given by people, as an acknowledgement of worth. Value may be given to a property either individually or collectively.

Value may be perceived to be local, or it may be perceived to be regional or universal in importance. Value may thus be 'given' different degrees and the degree of value is culturally specific.

Value is usually given to certain qualities or characteristics that properties contain or display, rather than necessarily the whole property or everything connected to it. Different degrees of value may therefore be attributed to different qualities or characteristics within a single property: some aspects may be perceived to be of universal value, while others are seen to be of regional or local value.

### **3. Meaning of Universal Value & Outstanding Universal Value**

Universal value means that a monument, site or group of buildings has a value that rises above local or regional value to a value that may be considered universal.

.What does the word outstanding add to universal value? It could be argued that not all cultural sites of universal value can be inscribed on the World Heritage list: only those that are ‘outstanding’ in some way. Consideration needs to be given to what the word outstanding signifies in this context.

Outstanding is applied to sites that are not only of universal value but can also be seen to be marked out by singularities that accentuate their value to a degree that they become of Outstanding Universal Value. In other words the site is so valuable that it ‘belongs’ to all humankind in that they believe it should be transmitted to future generations.

Sites that are inscribed on the World Heritage list should therefore be those which humankind collectively would wish to pass onto the next generation, and which are regarded as part of the world heritage of mankind as a whole. The Operational Guidelines state that these properties should be so important that they transcend national boundaries, and be of significance to present and future generations. In other words present and future generations should gain benefit in some way from the preservation and conservation of these properties, through their inscription on the World Heritage list.

### **4. Defining Cultural Qualities**

Outstanding Universal Value is attributed to cultural ‘qualities’ or characteristics within monuments, groups of buildings or sites. These qualities may change or be re-evaluated in the light of new knowledge or changing perceptions. Qualities may be tangible, such as architectural, or intangible such as an association with people or beliefs.

Cultural qualities may be discovered, such as archaeological, associational, scenic or natural qualities, or may be created, that is planned or designed. In the latter case, people have sought to introduce new qualities that add value.



Several qualities may be appreciated in the same property. Very few properties have only one quality.

Cultural qualities may, for example, be connected with:

- History
- Art
- Science

and these could include:

- Testimony to a distinctive culture, its way of life or its artefacts,
- Exemplification of skill and scale in construction
- Expression of aesthetic ideas/ideals/design skills
- Association with works of art, literary, pictorial or musical
- Associations with myth, folklore, historical events or traditions
- Spiritual and/or religious associations,
- Generation of aesthetic pleasure or satisfaction
- Commemoration – either individual or group memory
- Association with formative intellectual, philosophical and metaphysical ideas or movements
- Generation of sensory or heightened emotional responses - awe, wonder, terror, fear

## **5. Valuing Cultural Qualities**

People give value to cultural qualities. There are no intrinsic values in cultural qualities.

And the value that is given to cultural qualities may change over time.

The process of valuation will be influenced by many qualifying factors. And cultural qualities may have greater or lesser value to people depending whether they are acting as individuals or collectively.

Value may be influenced by factors such as:

- Rarity
- Abundance
- Influence: exhibits quality or qualities which have influenced developments elsewhere
- Exemplary: provides a good example of its type, style, or the work of a particular designer
- Grouping: a group of places illustrating the same or related phenomena
- Functionality: key interrelated, or interdependent, elements within the site or its setting
- Vulnerability: degree to which the qualities are at risk
- Associated artefacts: connected with noted collection of records or objects

- Distinctiveness: expressive of local customs and preferences or a unique creation
- Social value: interlinked with sense of community or national identity
- Economic value: associated with monetary value, either intrinsically or through products
- Popularity: providing a resource for a large number of people

If a quality is unique – that may or may not mean that it is given a high value. Uniqueness may be given high value if it is attached to a quality that is admired; some qualities may be valued for abundance rather than scarcity.

## **6. Assessing Outstanding Universal Value**

In considering whether a property has OUV it is necessary to :

- a. Define its qualities
- b. Consider the value of these qualities
- c. Consider whether that value is local, regional or universal

Monuments, sites or groups of buildings that have qualities that, either singly or in combination with others, have universal value may be considered to have Outstanding Universal Value, if their qualities are outstanding and humankind would wish to transmit them to future generations as part of the heritage of mankind as a whole.

## **7. Statement of Outstanding Universal Value**

The new Operational Guidelines asked for a Statement of Outstanding Universal Value to be constructed for properties to define those qualities, that either singly or in combination, have a value that may be considered to be universal and outstanding.

## **8. Cultural Diversity and Outstanding Universal Value**

Nearly all monuments, sites or groups of buildings reflect strong regional cultures. Hardly any cultural sites inscribed on the World Heritage list can be said to be truly international in terms of their qualities. The Pyramids, the Great Wall of China, and the Taj Mahal all reflect particularly local qualities, related to local 'cultures'. However these qualities, and the properties that exhibit them, are undoubtedly of Outstanding Universal Value.

Qualities that are 'given' universal value are not therefore always international in concept: regional or local cultural qualities can be given universal value.

In this respect cultural properties differ markedly from natural properties. Whereas cultural properties almost all are related to local, national or regional cultural traditions, natural properties can be unrelated to these traditions, even though natural properties may have a regional dimension in that certain types of eco-systems are only found in certain regions.

Valuing natural properties is however, as with cultural properties, related to human value systems: there is no such thing as a totally impartial assessment. Certain types of plants or species are valued for their rarity or scarcity: others are valued for their abundance. Isolated examples of a type of geological or natural phenomena may not necessarily be valued highly: the single example of a type of volcano may not be suggested as being of Outstanding Universal Value. This is a reflection of what the humankind has chosen to value in the natural world.

## **9. Comparative Assessments**

One of the key tools for assessing whether monuments sites or groups of buildings have Outstanding Universal Value is comparative assessment: considering how the nominated sites related to other similar properties in a geo-cultural region or on the World Heritage list. The quality of comparative assessments currently given in nominations is not always as high as might be desired and many have to be supplemented by ICOMOS during the evaluation process.

The lack of rigour for comparative assessments in many nominations often reflects the fact that Outstanding Universal Value has not been thoroughly analysed and therefore the comparative analysis has not been firmly based on appropriate qualities and values. Sometimes superficial characteristics are compared rather than the qualities that give a property Outstanding Universal Value.

This underlines the need for more capacity building in assessing and understanding the concept of Outstanding Universal Value.

Comparative assessments of cultural properties are limited by the existing knowledge of cultural properties world-wide. Cultural heritage has not been mapped in the same way that natural heritage has been quantified and mapped. It is thus far easier to carry out a comparative assessment for a natural property than it is for a cultural property.

Similarly thematic studies of natural sites are more easily underpinned by quantifiable data than with cultural sites, where only those sites that are known or documented can be considered in a thematic study. ICOMOS believes that there is a need to consider global thematic studies for cultural sites with some caution. Regional studies can however be extremely beneficial.

## **10. ICOMOS's Assessment of Outstanding Universal Value**

In assessing properties put forward for inscription, ICOMOS has to identify and assess those qualities that may, either singly or in combination, may give the property Outstanding Universal Value. ICOMOS finds that in many nominations the qualities of a property are not systematically set out and evaluated in a convincing way so as to justify OUV.

One of the difficulties seems to be in separating what a property is (the description) from why it is significant (the statement of Outstanding Universal Value). Often the reasons given for Outstanding Universal Value are not evaluations of qualities but statement of facts connected to what can be seen in the properties.

Writing a Statement of Outstanding Universal Value is not an easy task. ICOMOS considers that more training is needed in workshops at local and regional level, which will disentangle the process needed to appraise the qualities and values of monuments, sites or groups of buildings and help with the identification of Outstanding Universal Value.

## **11. Cultural Landscapes**

In recent years a fairly high percentage of nominated sites have been put forward as cultural landscapes. This category can be very valuable in allowing properties to be nominated from regions where discrete monuments are not a prominent or distinctive part of their cultural attributes, but where distinctive landscapes reflect very specific human interventions.

Living cultural landscapes, particularly those that are extensive and diverse, do however present challenges for their identification of qualities and Outstanding Universal Value. These landscapes are complex webs of inter-related structures, processes and people, all set within a 'natural' framework.

If more satisfactory nominations are to be put forward, more specific guidance is needed on how to identify cultural qualities in cultural landscapes and on how to sustain these qualities.

Equally it is true that if the development of Tentative Lists is properly to reflect the wealth of cultural landscapes in various regions, they need to be underpinned

by a deep understanding of the way qualities and value can be identified and assessed.

Workshops to build capacity in this field are urgently needed – as suggested in ICOMOS's Gap Report.

## **12. Management of Outstanding Universal Value**

The lack of a rigorous assessment of Outstanding Universal Value impacts adversely on the success of nominations: it may also make it difficult to manage properties.

Management Plans need to set out how the qualities for which a property is inscribed on the World Heritage list should be managed in order to sustain their Outstanding Universal Value. It is therefore essential that the qualities that give a property Outstanding Universal Value are fully understood and shared by all stakeholders. It is suggested that the best way to achieve this is to involve stakeholders in defining Outstanding Universal Value.

Some of the qualities for which a property is inscribed may be intangible qualities. It is however necessary to define clearly tangible qualities to which these intangible qualities relate. The management of a property will in many instances need to sustain intangible qualities through their tangible expressions.

In some instances properties will also include qualities of local or regional value: they may also be acknowledged but must be seen as separate from why the property was inscribed on the World Heritage list and the key thrust of the Management Plan.

## **13. The Fundamental Importance of Outstanding Universal Value to the World Heritage Process**

Outstanding Universal Value underpins the whole World Heritage process: it is what defines and sets apart the World Heritage Convention from other heritage conventions; it allows humankind to value cultural heritage in such a way that it transcends and crosses international boundaries.

The identification of Outstanding Universal Value is crucial if the *World Heritage Convention* is to have credibility. Only if Outstanding Universal Value is properly understood will properties on tentative lists and nominations adequately reflect their regions. Only if Outstanding Universal Value is satisfactorily identified and spelt out will nominations be well received. And only if Outstanding Universal Value is fully understood by the stakeholders of a property will the management plan and management regimes sustain Outstanding Universal Value.

Identifying, assessing and managing Outstanding Universal Value is not easy and ICOMOS considers that more training and support is needed to foster a wider understanding of the concept and its manifestations. As set out in the ICOMOS 'Gap' report, representative Tentative Lists are the starting points for a process to fill gaps and support better nominations, and these should be underpinned by rigorous assessments of the qualities and values of potential properties.



## **Background Paper**

**prepared by  
IUCN – The World Conservation Union**

### **Special Expert Meeting of the World Heritage Convention: The concept of Outstanding Universal Value**

**Kazan, Republic of Tatarstan, Russian Federation**

**6-9 April 2005**

## IUCN “Kazan” Statement

*IUCN – The World Conservation Union reaffirms the importance of the key test for the inscription of properties on the World Heritage List: that properties should be of Outstanding Universal Value (OUV) as defined in Articles 1 and 2 of the World Heritage Convention and in Paragraph 49 of the Operational Guidelines, which notes that:*

*"Outstanding Universal Value means cultural and/or natural significance which is so exceptional as to transcend national boundaries and to be of common importance for present and future generations of all humanity. As such, the permanent protection of this heritage is of the highest importance to the international community as a whole."*

*It is clear from these authoritative texts that the Convention is not intended to include all sites that are important for conservation but should only apply to a limited number that meet the test of OUV. As a consequence, and based on the text of the Convention itself, IUCN considers that the World Heritage List cannot, in principle, be regarded as open-ended. It is nonetheless recognized that new scientific information, as well as our understanding of natural phenomena and of their value, can develop in ways that lead in time to the recognition of some sites that would not merit inscription at present.*

*What sets properties of OUV apart is that their values transcend national boundaries and are of common importance for humanity. They are to be identified through the application of the ten World Heritage criteria and must meet the conditions of integrity and/or authenticity. Taken together, these requirements constitute the fundamental and integral elements of the concept of OUV.*

*IUCN believes that maintaining the credibility of the World Heritage List is intrinsically linked to a proper understanding, and the strict and rigorous application, of the OUV concept. IUCN also considers that any attempt to diminish or erode the key concept of OUV will weaken the standing of the Convention, undermine its intent and reduce its effectiveness as an international conservation tool.*

*A credible World Heritage List is one that includes all the properties that meet the stringent tests that are inherent with the concept of OUV, and only those properties; and one on which all properties are well managed to the standards set in the Convention. Therefore, IUCN favours capacity development to assist States Parties to apply the OUV concept to improve their Tentative Lists and ensure high-quality nominations.*

*Finally, and of fundamental importance, IUCN emphasizes that, inscribing a property in the World Heritage List is not the end of a process but rather the beginning of a major responsibility for ensuring that the property is effectively protected and managed for the benefit of humankind as a whole – for this and future generations.*



## 1. Introduction

IUCN welcomes the request from the 28th session of the World Heritage (WH) Committee to convene a special meeting of experts of all regions on the concept and the application of Outstanding Universal Value (OUV) in the implementation of the WH Convention. IUCN also welcomes the generous offer from the Municipality of Kazan and the Republic of Tatarstan in the Russian Federation to host this important event.

IUCN stresses that the concept of OUV is the foundation of the WH Convention and that its rigorous and consistent interpretation and application is the key to the worldwide recognition and attention that the Convention enjoys. IUCN's position derives from its involvement in the Convention since its inception, when it co-operated with UNESCO in the original drafting and negotiation of the Convention's text. Furthermore IUCN has substantially contributed, by providing technical advice to the WH Committee, to the intellectual development of the Convention since 1972.

The Bureau of the WH Committee remarked already at its 3<sup>rd</sup> session in 1979 that IUCN interpreted universal value strictly, deeming that only "the best property of its kind should be included in the List." Bernd Von Droste, former Director of the WH Centre, noted in 1997, "It is to the credit of IUCN that the criteria for determining the status of areas to be declared as World Natural Heritage have been applied impartially and with much rigour, assisting in maintaining the credibility of the World Heritage List" (Von Droste, 1997)<sup>13</sup>. This background of involvement and consistency of approach dictates IUCN's overarching goal in participating in this Special Expert Meeting: that is to stress the need to maintain the credibility of the WH Convention.

This paper sets out the IUCN position on the concept of OUV and its application in relation to natural and mixed WH properties (Section I). In addition it provides recommendations on the following three key issues (Section II):

- How to improve the process for the identification of properties of potential OUV;
- How to enhance the quality of nominations of properties of potential OUV; and
- How to achieve the effective management of WH properties.

This paper is based on the IUCN / UNEP-WCMC<sup>14</sup> Analysis of the WH List and Tentative Lists (*A Review of the Global World Heritage Network: Biogeography, Habitats and Biodiversity - 2004*) and the resulting draft strategy paper (*The World Heritage List: Future priorities for a credible and complete list of natural and mixed sites - 2004*) presented to the 28th session of the WH Committee (see *WHC-04/28COM INF.13B*). It follows the clear guidance in relation to OUV provided in the WH Convention and its *Operational Guidelines*. It is also based on precedents established by previous decisions of the WH Committee which provide a substantial body of "case law" and guidance in relation to the interpretation of OUV, as well as previous IUCN input to a number of expert meetings on WH.

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<sup>13</sup> Von Droste, 1997, *The World Heritage strategy – future directions*. In Protected Areas Programme PARKS, World Heritage Special Issue. Vo 7 No 2. June 1997. IUCN, Gland, Switzerland.

<sup>14</sup> UNEP World Conservation Monitoring Centre

## SECTION I THE CONCEPT OF OUTSTANDING UNIVERSAL VALUE

### ***2. The concept of OUV and its assessment***

#### **2.1 Principles and regulations of the *World Heritage Convention* and its *Operational Guidelines***

The preamble of the WH Convention recognises the importance of the concept of OUV by stating that “*parts of the cultural and natural heritage are of outstanding interest and therefore need to be preserved as part of the world heritage of mankind as a whole*”. Two things are important to note from this statement:

- The Convention was not conceived to ensure the protection of all cultural and natural heritage, but only those parts that are outstanding; and
- A global approach is emphasised by stressing that this heritage is to be preserved for mankind as a whole.

This view is elaborated in the Operational Guidelines of the Convention which define OUV as “*cultural and/or natural significance which is so exceptional as to transcend national boundaries and to be of common importance for present and future generations of all humanity. As such, the permanent protection of this heritage is of the highest importance to the international community as a whole.*” (Section II. A. paragraph 49)

OUV is thus the central construct of the Convention and IUCN considers the following issues are relevant in defining its meaning:

- **Outstanding**: For properties to be of OUV they should be exceptional. IUCN has noted in several expert meetings that: “the *World Heritage Convention* sets out to define the geography of the superlative – the most outstanding natural and cultural places on Earth” (Thorsell, 1997);
- **Universal**: The scope of the Convention is global in relation to the significance of the properties to be protected as well as its importance to all people of the world. By definition properties cannot be considered for OUV from a national or regional perspective; and
- **Value**: What makes a property outstanding and universal is its “value” which implies clearly defining the worth of a property, ranking its importance based on clear and consistent standards, and assessing its quality.

The last point takes up an important requirement defined by the Operational Guidelines: that for a property to be of OUV it needs to meet the criteria defined by the WH Committee. The revised Operational Guidelines (2005), Section II.D, paragraph 77 set out a single unified set of ten criteria for the assessment of OUV. These criteria offer an entry point for: (a) States Parties to justify the nomination of a property for WH listing, and; (b) Advisory Bodies and the Committee to evaluate whether that property meets one or more of the criteria. Therefore the OUV concept cannot be interpreted or applied without consideration of the ten WH criteria.

Furthermore, as noted in paragraph 78 of the Operational Guidelines; it is not enough for a site to meet the WH criteria, but it *must also meet the conditions of integrity and/or authenticity and must have an adequate protection and management system to ensure its safeguarding*. Thus, the conditions of integrity and/or authenticity are an integral element when considering the concept and application of OUV and without both having been met a property should not be listed.

In assessing nominated properties, IUCN is again guided by the Operational Guidelines, which *request Advisory Bodies to be objective, rigorous and scientific in their evaluations that should be conducted in a consistent standard of professionalism* (Paragraph 148, (b) and (c)).

## 2.2 Applying OUV to natural and cultural properties

As the Advisory Bodies responsible for the evaluation of new nominations, IUCN and ICOMOS take forward this task in relation to natural properties (nominated under criteria vii-x) and cultural properties (nominated under criteria i-vi) respectively. There has been some discussion in recent years amongst the WH Committee as to whether the two bodies apply the concept of OUV differently. It is important to note, however, that there are intrinsic differences between cultural and natural properties, some of which are summarised in Box 1 below. But this issue is not new to the Convention. The WH Committee, as early as 1979, noted that universal value was difficult to define and that even using comparative surveys it was more difficult to select cultural places than natural places for inclusion in the WH List. The differences between these two groups of properties have sometimes led to the incorrect conclusion that IUCN and ICOMOS do not have equivalent standards in interpreting and applying the concept of OUV. This point of view fails to take into account the fact that the underlying construction and definition of OUV is different for cultural and natural features, and this difference is ultimately reflected in the carefully drafted criteria for the Convention. An appreciation of this fundamental difference in cultural and natural properties, reflected in the WH criteria, is essential in addressing the application and development of the concept of OUV. The advice provided by the Advisory Bodies therefore reflects this difference through the development of distinctive but complementary assessment frameworks to equivalent professional standards.

<b>Box 1. Key differences between cultural and natural properties</b>	
<b>Cultural Properties</b>	<b>Natural Properties</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Sites tend to be fragmented, diverse and not evenly distributed worldwide.</li> <li>➤ The value or quality of sites tends to depend on things such as materials used; when and how a certain property was created; the history behind the property and the value that society may attribute to those qualities.</li> <li>➤ Values of sites are usually linked to regional cultural identity for which assessment is often subjective.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Most sites are discreet territorial units, are often large, and are distributed in most biomes and ecoregions of the world.</li> <li>➤ The value or qualities tend to be associated to measurable characteristics such as the diversity of species, number of endemic species etc. (as far as that information and data is available).</li> <li>➤ The values of properties are usually linked to scientific information which facilitates objective assessment.</li> </ul>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ The combination of the above tends to result in a high diversity of situations, thus making cultural heritage less predisposed to evaluation through clear classifications systems.</li> <li>➤ A typological framework (based on similarities) is generally used to assess cultural heritage, which is complemented by a chronological/regional framework and a thematic framework.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Scientific assessment (both in relation to geographical and biodiversity features) are reflected in classification systems.</li> <li>➤ A topological framework (based on biogeographical differences and unique characteristics) is generally used to assess natural heritage, complemented by a thematic framework.</li> </ul>
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Note: Information based on the IUCN and ICOMOS Analyses of the WH List

### 3. Assessing OUV for natural World Heritage properties

In evaluating a nominated property and assessing its potential OUV, IUCN considers a number of factors and draws upon a wide range of information and international expertise which include, but are not limited to, the following:

- The nomination dossier and its justification for the OUV of the property, based in particular on the criteria and a Global Comparative Analysis,
- Data analysis and desk reviews of literature (with the support of UNEP-WCMC),
- Global Thematic studies by IUCN and others (including those listed in annex 1),
- Analysis in relation to Global Classification and Prioritisation Systems (see section 3.1 and 3.2 below) and the IUCN Analysis of the WH List,
- Views and recommendations of expert reviewers drawn from IUCN’s extensive range of specialist networks (WCPA<sup>15</sup> and other IUCN Commissions, IUCN Regional and Country Offices, Global Thematic Programmes, IUCN Members and partners),
- Views and recommendations from the field evaluation mission, and
- The final review of all the above information and recommendation by the IUCN WH Panel.

#### 3.1 OUV in relation to the criteria for natural WH properties

As explained in Section 2 above, the application of the OUV concept needs to be seen in the context of the four criteria for assessing natural WH properties, as defined in Paragraph 77 of the Operational Guidelines. These criteria (vii – x) and how IUCN assesses them, are outlined below.

**Criterion (vii): Contain superlative natural phenomena or areas of exceptional natural beauty and aesthetic importance**

*IUCN’s assessment of OUV considers the following:* Two distinct ideas are embodied in this criterion. The first, ‘superlative natural phenomena’, can often be objectively measured and

<sup>15</sup> WCPA – World Commission on Protected Areas

assessed (the deepest canyon, the highest mountain, the largest cave system, the highest waterfall, etc.). The second concept, that of 'exceptional natural beauty and aesthetic importance' is harder to assess and evaluation tends to be more subjective. A total of 114 properties have been inscribed in the WH List under this criterion, most commonly in association with other criteria. The nature of this criterion is that the types of properties that are proposed for inscription will have comparable sites distributed on a world-wide, rather than regional basis, so standards applied under this criterion will need to meet a global standard of proof. This fact distinguishes the application of the aesthetic element of this criterion from those factors relevant to the consideration of cultural landscapes. IUCN's decisions in relation to this aspect are based on comparison with properties previously inscribed by the WH Committee under this criterion and, to the extent possible, they also involve a comparison of measurable indicators of scenic value. Following discussion on this in the context of nominations considered at the 28th session of the WH Committee, IUCN is currently undertaking additional work to better guide its assessment of this criterion.

**Criterion (viii): Be outstanding examples representing major stages of earth's history, including the record of life, significant on-going geological processes in the development of landforms, or significant geomorphic or physiographic features**

*IUCN's assessment of OUV considers the following:* The assessment framework for this criterion is global, reflecting both the global distribution of geomorphological features and the world-wide perspective required to encompass the representation of the 4.6 billion years of Earth history, address the evolution of life on Earth as well as the changes in the geography of the planet. Properties where discoveries have led to radical changes in our understanding of Earth history and geological processes are considered, rather than very narrow ranging and highly specialized features. In view of the specialized nature of some geological nominations, IUCN takes advice from geological experts, and is developing its contacts within international geoscience groups to strengthen the review base for geological properties. This criterion involves four distinct, although closely linked, natural elements relevant to geological and geomorphological science:

- (i) Earth's history - This subset of geological features includes phenomena that record important events in the past development of the planet such as the record of crustal dynamics, the genesis and development of mountains, plate movements, continental movement and rift valley development, meteorite impacts, and changing climate in the geological past. Properties that may be considered for inscription on the WH List under this category would primarily involve major discoveries that have led to our overall understanding of earth processes and forms as revealed by rock sequences or associations rather than fossil assemblages.
- (ii) The record of life - This subset includes palaeontological (fossil) sites. For evaluating such nominations IUCN has developed a checklist which is included for information in Box 2.

1. Box 2. IUCN Fossil Site Evaluation Checklist

1. Does the site provide fossils which cover an extended period of geological time: i.e. how wide is the geological window?

2. Does the site provide specimens of a limited number of species or whole biotic assemblages: i.e. how rich is the species diversity?
3. How unique is the site in yielding fossil specimens for that particular period of geological time: i.e. would this be the 'type locality' for study or are there similar areas that are alternatives?
4. Are there comparable sites elsewhere that contribute to the understanding of the total 'story' of that point in time/space: i.e. is a single site nomination sufficient or should a serial nomination be considered?
5. Is the site the only main location where major scientific advances were (or are) being made that have made a substantial contribution to the understanding of life on Earth?
6. What are the prospects for ongoing discoveries at the site?
7. How international is the level of interest in the site?
8. Are there other features of natural value (e.g. scenery, landform, and vegetation) associated with the site: i.e. does there exist within the adjacent area modern geological or biological processes that relate to the fossil resource?
9. What is the state of preservation of specimens yielded from the site?
10. Do the fossils yielded provide an understanding of the conservation status of contemporary taxa and/or communities: i.e. how relevant is the site in documenting the consequences to modern biota of gradual change through time?

Source: *Earth's Geological History – A contextual Framework for Assessment of World Heritage Fossil site nominations*, IUCN, 1996.

- (iii) Significant on-going geological processes in the development of landforms - Geomorphological properties record current geological processes and their relationship to landforms and landscapes (or physiography). This subset of criterion (viii) features represents active geomorphological processes such as those associated with glaciers, mountains, deserts, active volcanoes, rivers and deltas, island and coasts.
- (iv) Significant geomorphic or physiographic features - This subset includes landforms that are the products of active processes, and is intimately linked with the consideration of processes listed above. This group also includes features resulting from earlier or long-standing periods of activity, such as relict glacial landforms; extinct volcanic systems; and karst features. These features may sometimes also be considered in relation to the application of criterion (vii), in view of the aesthetic quality of some spectacular landforms.

IUCN is undertaking a *global thematic study* on Geological and Geomorphological WH Properties which will be available in mid-2005. However some preliminary findings indicate that Global Geodiversity, at a wide range of scales, already makes up a major component of the current WH property system: a total of 125 WH properties in 60 countries have features of geological significance (i.e. 2/3 of all

existing properties) although not all are inscribed under natural criterion (viii). The IUCN geological theme study, once finalized, will provide further guidance on this issue, and enable further consideration of the scope of the WH List in relation to thirteen different thematic groups of geological properties.

**Criterion (ix): Be outstanding examples representing significant ongoing ecological and biological processes in the evolution and development of terrestrial, fresh water, coastal and marine ecosystems and communities of plants and animals.**

*IUCN's assessment of OUV considers the following:* The assessment of this criterion depends on the scientific knowledge and understanding of Earth's ecosystems and the ecological and biological processes associated with their dynamics. To assess this criterion in an objective manner IUCN and partners have developed a number of *global thematic studies* (on forests, wetlands, marine and coastal areas, mountains, small island ecosystems, and boreal forests) that have guided IUCN's evaluation of this criterion. The full list is available in annex 1. Further studies continue to be carried out as funding allows.

**Criterion (x): contain the most important and significant natural habitats for in-situ conservation of biological diversity, including those containing threatened species of outstanding universal value from the point of view of science or conservation.**

*IUCN's assessment of OUV considers the following:* This criterion is associated with one of the core competencies of IUCN. In assessing this criterion, IUCN draws on expertise in its Commissions (with more than 10,000 expert members worldwide) and key IUCN members such as BirdLife International, WWF, Conservation International (CI), and The Nature Conservancy (TNC). There are a range of tools available to assess this criterion, including the IUCN Red List, Centres of Plant Diversity, Endemic Birds Areas of the World, the CI's Biodiversity Hotspots and WWF's Global 200 Ecoregions for Saving Life on Earth. Annex 1 provides a list of references regularly consulted in this regard while section 3.2 below provides more detail on the application of these global classification systems.

### **3.2 The role of Global Comparative Analysis in assessing OUV for natural properties**

In assessing the OUV concept, and in parallel to evaluating the criteria for which a property is nominated, IUCN addresses the question: how does the nominated property compare with other similar properties at the global level? Answering this question requires (i) the application of a global classification system and (ii) a comparison of the nominated property with other WH properties and protected areas within the same or a similar global context; in other words undertaking a Global Comparative Analysis as required under the Operational Guidelines, Section III.A.3, paragraph 132.3.

#### **(i) A global classification system**

In relation to criteria (ix) on ecological processes, and (x) on biodiversity, IUCN uses two global systems to classify properties:

- (a) the framework provided by Miklos Udvardy in "A Classification of the Biogeographical Provinces of the World", published in 1975 and updated in 1982; and
- (b) internationally recognised global classification and prioritisation systems for natural habitats and ecosystems.

The Udvardy Classification System: This classification system defines eight Biogeographical Regions, which are further divided into 14 Biomes and 193 Biogeographic Provinces, with provinces broadly corresponding to established and recognised floristic regions of botanists and faunal provinces of zoologists. This System of Realm and Biome classification has proved a very effective framework for assessing natural and mixed WH properties and is the basis for IUCN Analysis of the WH List (*WHC-04/28COM INF13*). It has helped identify that natural and mixed properties on the WH List cover almost all biogeographic regions, biomes, and habitats of the world with a relatively balanced distribution. The biomes most commonly found in WH properties are Mountains, Humid Tropical Forests, Tropical Dry Forests and Mixed Island Systems. However, there are major gaps in the WH coverage of the following biomes: Tropical Grassland/Savanna; Lake Systems; Tundra and Polar Systems; Temperate Grasslands; and Cold Winter Deserts.

Other Global Classification and Prioritisation Systems: The Udvardy system will continue to be important for the future assessment of natural and mixed WH properties. However, it has a number of limitations. Its use by IUCN is therefore complemented by other classification and prioritisation systems in the evaluation of natural and mixed WH properties. These include: the IUCN/SSC Habitat Classification System, WWF Ecoregions, Conservational International Biodiversity "Hotspots", BirdLife International Endemic Bird Areas, and IUCN/WWF Centres of Plant Diversity. These globally recognised systems help prioritise properties of global importance, of OUV. The IUCN Analysis of the WH List (*WHC-04/28COM INF13*), by using the above methodology to analyse the current coverage of natural WH properties, provides a list of 20 key areas with potential for new natural and mixed properties of OUV.

In this context it should be stressed that whilst the Operational Guidelines of the Convention call for a balanced, representative and credible WH List, it was never intended that the List should ensure complete "representivity" of all the Earth's numerous ecosystems and habitats, which is the role of national, regional and other international protected area systems and instruments, for example the UNESCO Biosphere Reserve Programme. Thus, global classification and prioritisation systems should be seen as tools to apply the OUV test and not as targets to achieve representivity of all Earth's ecosystems.

It is useful in this context to consider WH properties in relation to other types of protected areas. This relationship is expressed diagrammatically in Annex 2, which shows the relationship of WH properties to other protected area types and systems in terms of relative scale (global numbers) and the application of OUV as the key determinant for moving protected areas 'across the OUV line' onto the WH List. The diagram also highlights the importance of all protected areas for ecosystem, landscape and species conservation based on the application of the principle of effective representivity.

In relation to properties nominated under criterion (viii), for geological properties, these can be assessed through existing international geological and geomorphological classifications, globally significant stratotypes, global scale geo-processes past and present, and combinations of different genesis and history found in a locality. The WH Committee has emphasised particularly strongly the need for properties nominated under this criterion to include a thorough global comparative analysis.

The assessment of criterion (vii), for natural phenomena and beauty, as noted in section 3.1, is difficult to correlate to an international classification system. Properties nominated under



this criterion may therefore require only the comparison with other similar properties as outlined below.

#### **(ii) Comparison with other similar properties**

According to the Operational Guidelines (Section III.A.3, paragraph 132.3) the comparative analysis of the nominated property should be done in relation to similar properties, whether or not on the World Heritage List, both at the national and international levels. The comparative analysis should explain the importance of the nominated property in its international context by comparing it to other similar properties. There are two basic requirements that flow from this concept: (1) The comparative analysis needs to be global in scope, thus comparing the property with similar properties that exist around the world based, where possible, on a global classification system, and; (2) The nominated property should be compared not only with properties already inscribed on the WH List but also with other similar properties worldwide.

While a Global Comparative Analysis is an integral part of the nomination dossier it should be seen as an important step to be undertaken by the State Party before the property is nominated. Even at the time of including a property on the Tentative List, States Parties are encouraged to carry out a brief Comparative Analysis. In the opinion of IUCN, the quality of the Global Comparative Analyses in nomination documents needs to be greatly improved. To this end IUCN is currently preparing a *Resource Manual* on how to prepare high quality nominations for natural properties which will provide additional guidance on how to prepare these, including examples from nominations considered to demonstrate “best practice” in relation to this issue.

#### **4. OUV of Cultural Landscapes: an emerging concept**

Considerable changes have occurred since the adoption of the Convention, including the increasing recognition that nature cannot be seen in separation from society, leading to rethinking the notion of “pristine areas”. This resulted in the evolution and, in 1992, the adoption by the WH Committee, of the concept of “cultural landscapes”. A significant number of Cultural Landscapes have now been inscribed on the WH List and many of these have important natural values which IUCN has assessed. IUCN welcomes this development and fully recognises the importance of Cultural Landscapes to the WH Convention. It emphasizes that equally high standards of OUV should apply to them as to other properties, and they too should meet all the conditions of integrity and authenticity under the Convention. In making its assessment of Cultural Landscapes and in giving advice on these nominations to ICOMOS, IUCN endeavours to maintain these standards.

## **SECTION II PAST AND FUTURE APPLICATION OF OUV FOR NATURAL PROPERTIES**

#### **5. Previous trends in application of OUV for natural properties**

In order to have a better understanding of the application to date of the concept of OUV, it is necessary to have a brief overview of the current situation of the WH List in relation to natural WH properties. As of April 2005, 154 natural properties have been inscribed on the

WH List and 23 mixed properties. The rate of inscription of natural and mixed properties since 1978 is set out in Table 1 below.

**Table 1 – Natural and Mixed Properties nominated and inscribed in the World Heritage List**

	1978	1979	1980	1981	1982	1983	1984	1985	1986
No. of nominations	6	17	11	15	11	13	13	8	8
No. properties inscribed	4	11	5	11	7	10	7	5	6

	1987	1988	1989	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995
No. of nominations	17	11	6	9	12	14	14	13	9
No. properties inscribed	9	8	3	5	6	4	4	8	6

	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004
No. of nominations	16	15	8	22	23	20	5	15	17
No. properties inscribed	7	8	3	13	11	6	1	5	5

Note: figures above include natural and mixed properties, including extensions and deferrals

There are a number of issues relevant to this table:

- In the first 10 years of the Convention the rate of positive recommendations for inscription was high, with an average of 70% of positive recommendations in relation to the total number of nominations. This is not surprising as States Parties proposed the most well-known and outstanding natural properties worldwide. Indeed during this period many of the properties inscribed were included in the first IUCN Global Study, *The World's Greatest Natural Areas: an indicative inventory of natural sites of World Heritage Quality* (1982).
- After that initial period the average percentage of positive recommendations reduces to 48% for the period 1989-2004. Therefore, over the past 15 years just over half of all natural and mixed nominations were the subject of a decision to either reject or defer. The main reasons for this are:
  - (a) The IUCN evaluation process has been increasingly guided by better information, particularly a number of global and thematic studies prepared by IUCN and other partners, thus increasing the rigour and objectivity of the evaluation process. IUCN notes that a number of successfully listed nominations coming from Latin America in recent years were guided by recommendations from global and thematic studies; in particular the *Global Overview of Wetland and Marine Protected Areas on the World Heritage List* (IUCN, 1997) and recommendations from the *Expert Meeting on Tropical Forests* held in Berastagi, Indonesia in 1998.
  - (b) A more rigorous application of the Conditions of Integrity as outlined in the Operational Guidelines. Many of the properties evaluated by IUCN were deferred or referred by the WH Committee on these grounds.

As already noted in section 3.2 above, the IUCN Analysis of the WH List in relation to natural properties made a number of observations and recommendations about the current coverage of the WH List. It also proposed a list of 20 key areas within these biomes with potential for new natural and mixed WH nominations of OUV. That list is indicative but not exclusive – there may be properties in other areas that also merit inscription, but the emphasis should be placed on these priority habitats indicated. In addition, IUCN made a number of recommendations for a future strategy to ensure a credible and complete list of natural and mixed properties. Further recommendations are made below in relation to the application of OUV.

## **6. Recommendations for the future application of OUV for natural properties**

Based on the discussion above, IUCN would like to provide recommendations to the three principle bodies of the Convention (the States Parties, the WH Committee – working through its Secretariat, the WH Centre, and the Advisory Bodies) on three key issues relating to the future application of OUV. These are:

- How to improve the process for the identification of natural properties of potential OUV;
- How to enhance the quality of nominations of natural properties of potential OUV; and
- How to achieve the effective management of natural WH properties.

### **6.1 How to improve the process for the identification of natural properties of potential OUV**

The WH Convention and Operational Guidelines request each State Party to submit a Tentative List (TL) of the cultural and natural properties considered to be of potential OUV situated within their territory. At its 24th session in 2000, the WH Committee confirmed the importance of these Lists for planning purposes, for comparative analyses of nominations and for facilitating the preparation of global and thematic studies. It also decided that nominations would not be considered unless the nominated property had already been included on the TL of the State Party concerned. States Parties are encouraged to harmonize their TLs at regional and thematic levels. Harmonization of TLs is the process whereby States Parties, with the assistance of the Advisory Bodies, collectively assess their respective TLs to review gaps and identify common themes and ecosystems across a region.

From the perspective of IUCN there are a number of key issues relevant to TLs:

- Most existing TLs are still of poor technical quality, are biased towards potential cultural nominations and have not been harmonized at the regional level. In their present state they are of limited value as a planning tool for implementing the Convention in the field of natural properties;
- Notwithstanding this, there are a number of recent examples which IUCN considers to display “best practice” in relation to TL preparation, including TLs prepared by Canada and Madagascar. It is important that States Parties draw on such examples in preparing their own Lists and also make more effective use of the various studies prepared by IUCN and other bodies (refer Annex 1) to assist in the preparation of TLs.
- Further, IUCN considers that more emphasis should be placed by States Parties on natural and mixed properties in their TL preparation.

Enhancing the process for preparing Tentative Lists is one key way to improve the process for the identification of properties of potential OUV. This and further practical recommendations to States Parties, the WH Committee and the Advisory Bodies in addressing this question are outlined below.

**Recommendations to States Parties:**

1. Improve the quality of Tentative Lists (TLs) by better use of relevant material, particularly thematic studies prepared by the Advisory Bodies and existing “Best Practice” examples of TLs, and undertake regional harmonization as required under the Operational Guidelines;
2. Give greater attention to the preparation of rigorous and comprehensive Global Comparative Analyses in the preparation of nominations and TLs;
3. Give priority in all national events organised on WH to promoting a better understanding of the concept and application of OUV. It is expected that the outcomes from the Kazan Expert Meeting will provide valuable input to such events;
4. Make better use of the expertise available in networks of the Advisory Bodies. In this regard IUCN reiterates its commitment to support States Parties through the expertise available within its World Commission on Protected Areas (WCPA) in particular; and
5. Encouraging greater international cooperation among States Parties in relation to regional harmonisation and the preparation of TLs including through sharing information on “best practice”.

**Recommendations to the WH Committee:**

1. Give priority, both in operational and financial recommendations, to the further development and implementation of global and thematic studies;
2. Refocus the use of the limited funding available for training under the WH Fund to enhance the capacity of States Parties to better implement the Convention, including the development of comprehensive TLs; and
3. Reconsider ways and means to provide greater financial support to the work of the Advisory Bodies, particularly to enable better use of their expertise in capacity development.

**Recommendations to the Advisory Bodies:**

1. Continue to support the work of the Convention through the development of global and thematic studies on emerging themes and issues to assist with the identification of sites that may meet OUV criteria;
2. Give increased priority to capacity development to assist States Parties in the better implementation of the Convention, particularly preparation of comprehensive TLs;
3. Better define ways and means to make available to the States Parties the expertise available in their networks of experts; such as IUCN-WCPA; and
4. Obtain additional institutional and financial support to make available in as many languages as possible existing global and thematic studies.

## ***6.2 How to improve the quality of nominations of natural properties of potential OUV***

Some of the key shortcomings encountered by IUCN in evaluating nominations of natural and mixed properties are:

- The justification for inscription is not always linked to the criteria for assessing OUV, thus not making a clear case on the application of OUV to the nominated property;
- The Global Comparative Analysis in many nominations is poorly developed and often focuses on a national or regional level rather than a global level;
- Cartographic information is often poor, thus not allowing for a proper assessment on where the values of the nominated property are located and how they are protected;
- The conditions of integrity are often not presented in an objective way, thus many threats to the protection and management of the property are only identified during the field evaluation;
- While a nomination normally includes a management plan for the nominated property, these may be of poor quality, lacking clear management objectives, and often unclear as to the status of approval and implementation;
- There is increasing use of serial and transboundary nominations by States Parties. However, the rationale for using a serial approach is often unclear, thus not making a clear case on how all the components proposed adequately fulfil WH criteria. In the case of transboundary nominations there have been cases of nominations prepared by only one of the States Parties involved, thus with limited or no information on the values existing in the property that belong to the other State Party.
- The confusion over the definition between Cultural Landscapes and mixed properties; and
- Putting forward properties under all four natural criteria with the hope that this will improve the chances of listing.

Finally it is important to note that the Committee has on occasion inscribed natural and mixed properties by overruling the recommendation from IUCN. While this is a prerogative of the Committee as the decision-making body of the Convention, it is important that the inscription process be guided by technical considerations (including biodiversity and other conservation criteria). If political factors determine decisions, this will in time undermine the credibility of the WH List, thus reducing its attraction to potential donors and development agencies.

IUCN recommends the following actions are required to improve the quality of nominations.

### **Recommendations to States Parties:**

1. The preparation of new nominations should follow a comprehensive review and update of each State Party's TL;
2. Make better use of those nominations that can be considered "models" when preparing new nominations.
3. Give greater attention to involving all experts and institutions (both governmental and NGOs, as well as national and international) that can provide expert advice and professional technical input to the nomination process;
4. Give priority to the preparation of rigorous and comprehensive Global Comparative Analyses as part of the nomination process, making better use of the existing global and thematic studies;

5. Make better use of the expertise available in the Advisory Bodies networks to obtain technical guidance in the preparation of new nominations; and
6. Encourage, in accordance with the objectives of the Convention, greater international cooperation among States Parties in relation to the preparation of high-quality nominations.

**Recommendations to the WH Committee:**

1. Refocus the use of the limited funding available for training under the WH Fund to enhance the capacity of States Parties to prepare high-quality nominations;
2. Maintain the credibility of the WH List by being guided in decision-making by the technical recommendations from the Advisory Bodies;
3. Reconsider ways and means to provide greater financial support to the work of the expert networks of the Advisory Bodies, particularly as to allow these experts to work “up-stream” in supporting the nomination process; and
4. Request the WH Centre to make available to States Parties those nominations considered “best practice” in order to assist the preparation of high-quality nominations, if possible by type of property (marine, forest, geological, etc.), for the information of States Parties

**Recommendations to the Advisory Bodies:**

1. Give increased priority to capacity development to assist States Parties in preparing high-quality nominations, including preparation of comprehensive Global Comparative Analyses;
2. Better define ways and means to make available to the States Parties, on request, support from their networks - such as IUCN/WCPA - to work “up-stream” in assisting States Parties’ efforts to prepare high-quality nominations. This should be done under specific terms and conditions in order to not jeopardize the subsequent independent assessment of nominations.

### **6.3 How to achieve the effective management of natural WH properties**

The conditions of integrity and/or authenticity are an integral element when considering the concept and application of OUV. Each nominated property should have an appropriate management plan or other documented management system, including a monitoring process, which should specify how the OUV of a property and its integrity will be maintained and enhanced. Such a management plan or management system is a mandatory part of any nomination dossier. It is important to note that for natural and mixed properties, most of which are protected areas, management planning has long been considered a key tool to ensure protection.

Management must be seen as a continuous process to ensure that the objectives for which a protected area was established are effectively met. In the context of the WH Convention this implies, as noted in Paragraph 96 of the Operational Guidelines, the protection and management of the property to ensure that its OUV and the conditions of integrity and/or authenticity at the time of inscription are maintained or enhanced in future. It is also crucial that management plans are developed in a broader socio-economic context mindful of the impact of wider landscape needs, sectoral policies and practices. In this sense, buffer zones

and transition / influential zones should also be considered. Therefore management plans in the context of the Convention are an important tool to implement Article 5 of the Convention.

Management planning should be seen as a cycle that requires on-going refinement and adaptation based on monitoring and evaluation. The management plan should provide practical guidance managing a property based on the best available data and scientific information and where appropriate traditional knowledge.

While the management plan is a key tool for maintaining the values and integrity of a WH property, sustainable management also requires:

- Adequate national legislation relevant to WH that is complementary to and supportive of other laws and regulations on protected areas and natural resource management;
- Adequate institutional arrangements for the management of WH properties; which should be open to and inclusive of input from NGOs, local communities and other key stakeholders;
- The preparation, legal adoption or support by any other effective means (such as customary laws) of a management plan for each property and, in the case of a serial property, of an integrated management framework to guide the actions to be implemented in all sites forming the property;
- Effective ways and means for achieving sustainable financing;
- An on-going process of capacity development, supported by adequate human resources incentives, to ensure high professionalism of managers and rangers; and
- That the assessment of management effectiveness is considered as an integral part of the management cycle.

IUCN recommends that the following actions are necessary to improve the management of WH properties:

#### **Recommendations to States Parties:**

1. Improve the quality of Management Plans by using existing available best practice guidance, such as that developed by IUCN/WCPA on management planning;
2. Give greater attention to assess the conditions of integrity during the preparation of TLs and new nominations and using this process to identify what management measures are needed to enhance the protection of the property and promote their implementation *if possible before the nomination of the property*;
3. Enhance existing institutional and legal frameworks in order for them to be supportive of the objectives of the WH Convention. Special attention should be given to issues associated with the resource sector, including extractive industries, and WH protection;
4. Develop initiatives for achieving the sustainable financing of protected areas, using WH properties as flag-ships to promote greater support for natural heritage conservation;
5. Increase investment in capacity development as part of comprehensive human resources policies for protected areas and WH properties; and
6. Incorporate management effectiveness assessments as an integral part of the management cycle.

**Recommendations to the World Heritage Committee:**

1. Refocus the use of the limited funding available for training under the WH Fund to enhance the capacity of States Parties so as to better prepare and implement management plans for WH properties;
2. Encourage States Parties to apply lessons-learned from the UNESCO-IUCN-UNF *Enhancing Our Heritage* Project to assess management effectiveness of WH properties and to report on key findings through the Periodic Reporting process;
3. Give higher priority to assess the State of Conservation of WH properties, both through reactive monitoring and periodic reporting; and
4. Focus more on generic threats to WH properties such as climate change, illegal activities, infrastructure development etc.

**Recommendations to the Advisory Bodies:**

1. Develop best practice on management planning tailored to the requirements of the WH Convention. In this regard IUCN and the WH Centre are exploring options to develop a Resource Manual on Management Planning for WH properties;
2. Give priority to capacity development oriented to assist States Parties in the preparation and implementation of management plans, including assessing management effectiveness;
3. Better define ways and means to make available to the States Parties, if they wish to apply for such support, the expertise available in IUCN/WCPA on management planning;
4. Obtain additional institutional and financial support in order to make available in as many languages as possible the existing WCPA Best Practice Guidelines on Management Planning.
5. Develop global position statements on generic threats to WH properties.



## ANNEX 1

Sources of information for Global Comparative Analyses and the review and update of Tentative Lists

### **IUCN technical and thematic studies:**

- The World's Greatest Natural Areas: an indicative inventory of natural sites of World Heritage Quality (1982).
- Earth's geological history: a contextual framework for assessment of World Heritage fossil site nominations (1994).
- Global Overview of Wetland and Marine Protected Areas on the World Heritage List (1997).
- A Global Overview of Forest Protected Areas on the World Heritage List (1997).
- A Global Overview of Human Use of World Heritage Natural Sites (1997).
- A Global Overview of Protected Areas on the World Heritage List of Particular Importance for Biodiversity (2000).
- Which oceanic islands merit World Heritage status? (1991).
- Report of the working group on application of the *World Heritage Convention* to islands of the Southern Ocean (1992).
- Future directions for natural WH sites in East and Southeast Asia. Filling the Biome Gaps: a thematic approach to achieving Biodiversity conservation through World Heritage, Les Molloy (2000).
- Potential natural World Heritage sites in Europe, Lars-Erik Esping (1998).
- A Global Representative System of Marine Protected Areas, World Bank/IUCN. 4 vols. (1995)

### **Reports from selected regional meetings and UNESCO World Heritage initiatives to identify potential natural World Heritage Sites:**

- Task force to select a global inventory of fossil sites (1991);
- Nordic World Heritage - proposals for new areas for the UNESCO World Heritage List (1996);
- Identification of potential World Heritage sites in Arab countries (1999);
- Tropical Forests (Berastagi meeting report, 1998);
- Identification of WH properties in the Pacific (1999);
- Regional Workshop on the Nomination of World Heritage Sites, Mozambique (2000);
- Seminar on Natural Heritage in the Caribbean, Suriname (2000);
- Central Asian meeting (2000);
- Karst sites in East and South East Asia (2001);
- Alpine Arc meetings (2000-2001).
- Tropical marine and coastal sites (Vietnam workshop, 2002).
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- IUCN (2004). The World Heritage List: Future priorities for a credible and complete list of natural and mixed sites. Protected Areas Programme, IUCN.
- UNESCO (1972) Convention concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage, adopted by the General Conference at its seventeenth session, Paris, 16 November 1972, WHC-2001/WS/2 (<http://whc.unesco.org/en/conventiontext>)
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- UNESCO (2005). Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention. WHC.05/2, 1 February 2005. Paris: UNESCO World Heritage Centre
- World Conservation Monitoring Centre (1992). Global Biodiversity: Status of the Earth’s Living Resources. London: Chapman & Hall.

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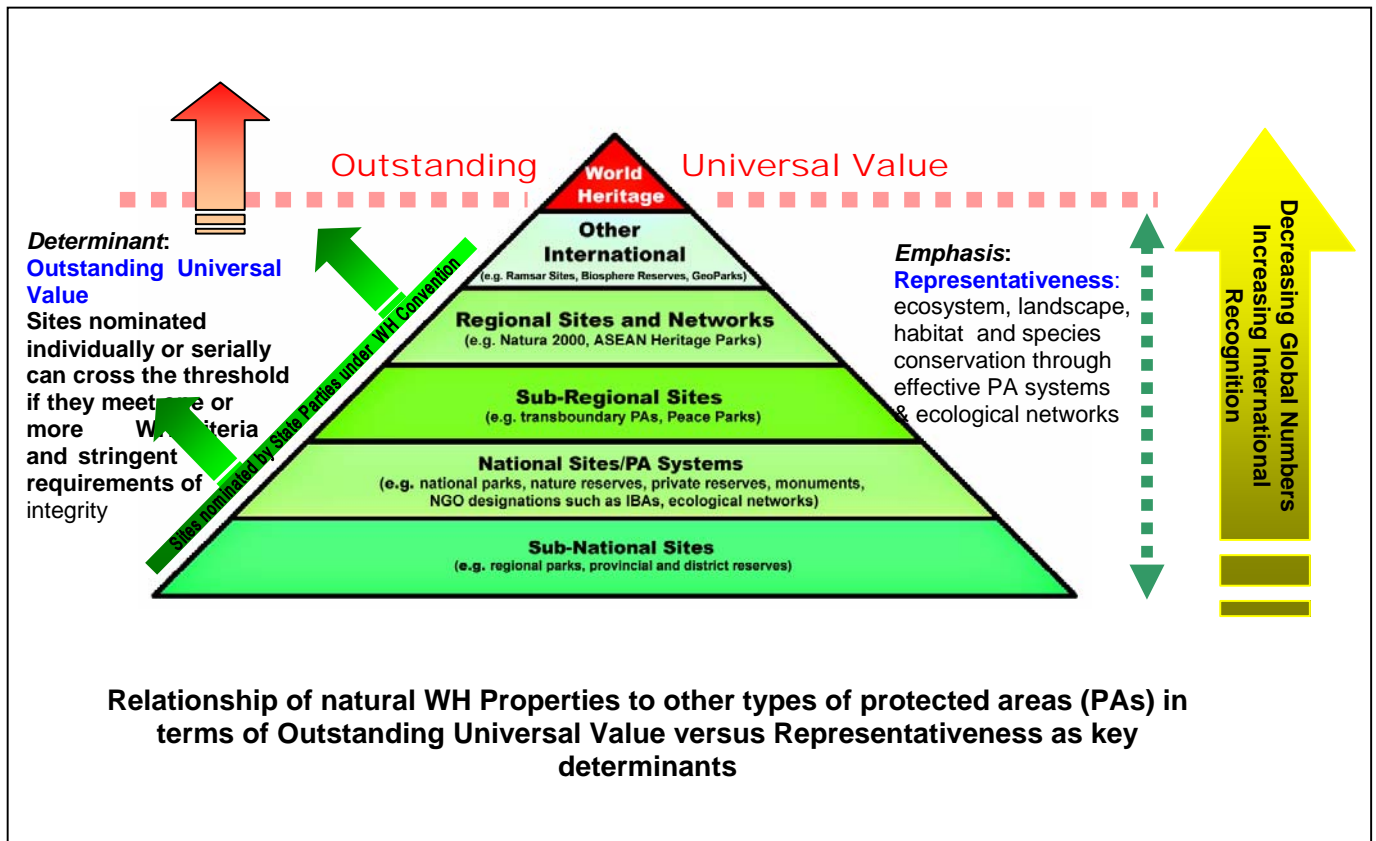
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Information on Properties included in the World Heritage List, UNESCO WH Centre website: <http://whc.unesco.org/en/list>

## ANNEX 2

Schematic representation of the relationship of natural WH properties to other types of protected areas (Chape 2004)



INTERNATIONAL CENTRE FOR THE  
STUDY OF THE PRESERVATION AND  
RESTORATION OF CULTURAL PROPERTY

CENTRE INTERNATIONAL D'ETUDES  
POUR LA CONSERVATION ET LA  
RESTAURATION DES BIENS CULTURELS



*ICCRUM Reflection on the Concept of  
Outstanding Universal Value*

prepared by Joseph King

Background Paper Presented at the Special Experts' Meeting of the *World Heritage Convention*: The Concept of Outstanding Universal Value

Kazan, Republic of Tatarstan, Russian Federation  
6-9 April 2005

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prepared by Joseph King

Special Experts' Meeting of the World Heritage Convention: The Concept of Outstanding Universal Value, Kazan, 6-9 April 2005

At its 28th session in Suzhou, China in 2004, the World Heritage Committee inscribed the 788th site onto the World Heritage List. According to the *World Heritage Convention*, for a site to be inscribed on the List, it must have "Outstanding Universal Value". The Operational Guidelines to the Convention (most recently updated in February 2005) make clear that the *World Heritage Convention* is not meant to cover all sites of great interest, but rather, only "a select list of the most outstanding of these from an international viewpoint".

As Sarah Titchen points out in a paper written in 1996, the intent of the drafters of the Convention, that it is to only cover a very select sub-group of heritage, is made more clear by the fact that the General Conference of UNESCO also adopted a *Recommendation Concerning the Protection, at National Level, of the Cultural and Natural Heritage*, covering sites of "special" value at the national level, at the same time that it adopted the *World Heritage Convention*. These two instruments were, together, meant to cover the wide variety of heritage found in UNESCO's Member States. Unfortunately the *Recommendation* is largely forgotten today meaning that only half of the scheme is being implemented.

But, as Titchen goes on to point out, the drafters of the Convention also made a clear choice not to give a definition of Outstanding Universal Value. Recognizing that the concept would, most likely need to evolve with time, they gave the World Heritage Committee the flexibility to develop criteria, which could change over time, for selecting which sites to inscribe on the World Heritage List.

In recent years, and in particular since the 1994 launch of the Global Strategy, our understanding of what constitutes heritage has undergone a shift to include a much wider variety of sites including vernacular architecture, cultural landscapes, cultural itineraries, and places of spiritual significance whether monumental or not. As this concept has continued to develop, it appears that the Committee is beginning to experience a certain discomfort about being sure of whether the sites that they are examining for inclusion on the List really do have Outstanding Universal Value. The Committee has, therefore, sought guidance from this Experts Meeting to try to further discuss the concept of Outstanding Universal Value with the aim of developing a clearer understanding for themselves and the larger public as to which sites have Outstanding Universal Value and therefore merit inscription on the World Heritage List.

ICCROM is submitting this reflection as a contribution to the discussion of what, at the present time, is meant by Outstanding Universal Value as it applies to the *World Heritage Convention*.

### *The Subjective Nature of Values*

Much work has been done in recent years on the concept of values in conservation. Essentially, we would not be interested in conserving a place if we did not assign some sort of value or importance to it. An understanding of the values of the cultural heritage will determine how we treat it, conserve it, present it, enjoy it, and use it in the future.

The problem that we have, however, is in determining exactly what values are assigned to a particular place. Values by their nature are subjective and can change over time. Where we may at one time have talked about the intrinsic nature of site or monument, we now realize that different people and different groups will assign different values to the heritage. Not only might these values be dissimilar, but they might even be in conflict with each other. It is therefore becoming a common practice when trying to determine the values of a site to ask, in a consultative process, not only why the site is important, but in which ways and to whom. This implies starting with a “bottom-up” approach, determining all the stakeholders for a site and then trying to determine why the site is important to each one of them. When thought of in this way, the “world community”, which is represented in some way by the World Heritage Committee, is only one of the stakeholders who may assign values to a site. But it is all of the values, when taken together, which give the sites its overall significance.

South Africa recognized this problem at the national level when developing its new heritage legislation in the post-apartheid area. Rather than staying with the already existing list of national heritage, a process of consultation has been initiated at a regional level to reexamine sites that were once listed and to try to develop new lists first at the regional level and then at the national heritage that truly reflects the diversity and richness of the heritage in that country.

Similarly, the World Heritage Committee, in launching the Global Strategy in 1994, was looking to develop a richer and more diverse World Heritage List which reflects the diversity of cultures and values found throughout the world.

### *Outstanding Universal Value*

Given this diversity of understanding of the importance of a place, is it then ever possible to say that any site has Outstanding Universal Value? If by Outstanding Universal Value, we mean a set of values that all people everywhere hold in relation to a specific site, the answer would probably be no. There is no site that would have the same meaning for all people in all parts of the world.

Rather, when thinking about Outstanding Universal Value in relation to culture, we must try look at all of cultures of the world and the heritage that they have produced, and try to

represent this richness and diversity within the World Heritage List. As Jukka Jokilehto said in a recent paper presented on the topic:

*In relation to cultural heritage the idea of universal value can be seen in the authentic (true) creative expressions of specific cultures. We can perceive cultural heritage of humanity to form its own universe, which is qualified by individual cultures and their products. As part of this human universe, a heritage resource will obtain “universal value” so far as it is a true and authentic expression of a particular culture. In relation to World Heritage, “outstanding” can be interpreted as: the best and/or most representative example or examples of a kind of heritage.*

### ***Practical Implications for the World Heritage Convention***

If we accept Jokilehto’s definition, then Outstanding Universal Value becomes the importance that we give a site in telling the overall story of mankind as represented by the diversity of its cultures. But, this doesn’t answer the question of how the Committee can determine what are the “best and/or most representative examples”.

It has often been argued that IUCN and ICOMOS have differing standards for how they determine if a site has Outstanding Universal Value. The implication is that IUCN has a more rigorous test (the best of the best) while ICOMOS takes a more inclusive approach (representative of the best). This difference, it is often argued, leads to the imbalance of the List in favor of cultural sites.

Given the specificity of the cultures of the world, however, it is not clear this perceived difference actually holds. In trying to represent, as much as possible, all the cultures of the world, it is necessary to cast a wide net. It would not be possible to take a heritage type, for example cultural landscapes, and say that one or two are the best cultural landscapes in the world, or even in one region. The importance of a specific cultural landscape will be found in how a particular culture over time has developed its relationships with its natural surroundings. Even two cultural landscapes that may look very similar, may have many different values associated with them based on the specificity of the cultural involved. The implication is that there will need to be a great many cultural landscapes (or any other typology of heritage) in order for the World Heritage List to truly represent the many cultures of the world.

This does not mean that comparisons are not possible or even necessary. Without them, we would wind up with all heritage sites inscribed on the List. In making comparisons, however, we must make sure that we are comparing like sites that are representative of a specific culture and period of time. The key is knowing how to draw the categories within which we can compare the sites. The categories must be large enough to be inclusive, while restrictive enough to be sure that the sites being inscribed are the best and/or most representative examples.

ICOMOS has taken an important step in this regard with the framework that it developed as part of its “Gaps Analysis” presented to the 28<sup>th</sup> session of the World Heritage Committee in Suzhou. But, ICCROM feels that the framework presented is only the first step in making more explicit the reasoning given by ICOMOS and eventually the Committee for decisions about which sites are the best and/or most representative examples, and therefore of Outstanding Universal Value.

ICCROM considers the continued development of this framework to be very important, and proposes that the World Heritage Committee might want to invest in a series of regional meetings where a wide variety of experts from those regions, examine the framework and continue to develop it to the point where they feel that it is truly representative of the cultures of that region. It might be useful to open these meetings to disciplines outside of the heritage field (including anthropology, history, sociology and even philosophy) in order to get fresh ideas and perspectives.

The results of these meetings may yield a result similar to the one already proposed by ICOMOS, or it may have significant differences based on the in-depth knowledge of those experts. While recognizing that similar meetings have been held in the past as part of the Global Strategy, we feel that they have never had a specific structure on which to base their work. The ICOMOS framework could give them that structure.

The final result of this exercise would give States Parties, ICOMOS, and the Committee a more explicit set of standards from which to make the necessary comparative analyses in determining Outstanding Universal Value. It would allow States Parties to better communicate to the Committee why they think that the heritage they are proposing has Outstanding Universal Value. It would give ICOMOS a more precise means of making their evaluations, and it would help the Committee in making the final decision on which sites to include on the List. Of course, this framework could (and should) be revised over time as we continue to develop our notions of what constitutes the cultural heritage.

Another important result of such a framework is that it would help both the States Parties and the Committee to communicate to the general public why certain sites are considered, at this time, to be of Outstanding Universal Value. Because, while it is true that values do change over time as our perception of the heritage changes, the best we can do is to communicate to present and future generations why we made the particular choices that we did as to which sites to include on the World Heritage List.

It is hoped that this reflection will help in some small way to stimulate the debate that we will have over the next two days, and ICCROM very much looks forward to the results of these discussions which will be useful, not only in the World Heritage context, but in a larger sense, to our work on the conservation of all of the cultural heritage of mankind.



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