

THE EVOLVING CONCEPT OF UNIVERSAL VALUES IN CULTURAL LANDSCAPES : FROM THE ATHENS AND VENICE CHARTERS TO THE 2004 COMBINED WORLD HERITAGE CRITERIA

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Abstract

The Athens Charter of 1931 set forth the first statements on the aesthetics of the surrounding areas of ancient monuments by calling for care in the development of constructions near than citing that “surroundings should be given special consideration”. Settings were to be preserved with picturesque intent avoiding power poles, signs, and other competing elements to preserve the “ancient character” of the monuments. The Venice Charter, 1964, indicates at the outset the importance of defining and preserving not only the monument but the urban or rural setting around it as an expression of the culture. In both of these international charters setting is defined as important but clearly as secondary to the designated historic monument. The ICOMOS-IFLA International Committee for Historic Gardens framed the Florence Charter on 21 May 1981 as an addendum to the Venice Charter addressing the value of historic gardens as monuments in and of themselves.

Further after considerable international debate the World Heritage Operational Guidelines were amended in 1992 to include *cultural landscapes* and it is apparent that this addition has been instrumental in focusing on the universal value of the combined works of humanity and nature. Thirty-six evolved continuing or relict, designed and associative landscapes have received World Heritage listing between 1992 and 2003. These cultural resources are no longer confined to narrow thinking as isolated monuments but are defined as large areas of living culture. Reflections on World Heritage international and regional meetings addressing cultural landscapes since 1992, the IUCN categories of protected areas and the 2004 revision of the World Heritage Operational Guidelines merging the cultural and natural criteria will be carried out. An exploration of the evolution of charters and guidance on the issue of landscapes and townscapes from their consideration as secondary “settings” to the designation of cultural landscapes as World Heritage sites will be explored in this paper.