

Christina CAMERON (Canada)

Towards a cultural resource monitoring network

Founded as a permanent international non-governmental organization in 1965, ICOMOS was created to promote the study of conservation and restoration of historical monuments. It boasts a strong record of achievement. The organization has successfully established an international group of scientists and building conservation experts, sponsored many international symposia and congresses, drafted international charters to safeguard architectural heritage and disseminated much technical information. In the words of Dr Lemaire, a former ICOMOS president, ICOMOS represents «a paramount brain bank in the conservation of buildings».

The focus of my paper is the specific role that ICOMOS plays with respect to the World Heritage Convention, and the opportunities that challenge its further participation in this area.

At the outset, ICOMOS was an active participant in drafting the World Heritage Convention, adopted in 1972 by the UNESCO General Assembly. The stated purpose is the *protection* of cultural and natural sites deemed to be of universal significance. With well over 100 States Parties signatory, it is arguably UNESCO's most successful and popular Convention. ICOMOS has a strong and continuing role in its implementation.

ICOMOS is assigned the role of scientific advisor to the World Heritage Committee by the Convention itself. Along with ICCROM and IUCN, ICOMOS is charged with providing documentation and analysis for the evaluation of sites proposed by States Parties for designation. It is ICOMOS which prepares the analyses using criteria of the World Heritage Committee. This documentation is of critical importance to the outcome of the Committee's deliberations, and in this role, ICOMOS has distinguished itself by providing independent professional evaluations.

In its initial response to the World Heritage Convention, ICOMOS quite rightly devoted itself to the most pressing problem of the time, namely the analysis of candidate sites for inscription on the World Heritage List. But as the Convention matures, as the number of States Parties grows and as World Heritage Sites now number well

over three hundred, the time has now come to shift gears, to aim skills at what the Convention is ultimately about, namely the *protection* of sites of outstanding universal value.

To date ICOMOS has failed to meet the needs of the World Heritage Committee for accurate information on the condition of cultural World Heritage Sites. Based on the deliberations of the 1972 UNESCO General Assembly, it is clear that the founders believed that universal heritage was irreplaceable, that national efforts might not always be sufficient to provide protection and that a collective effort by the international community would sometimes be required to ensure the adequate protection of World Heritage Sites.

The World Heritage Committee has frequently wrestled with this question of how to monitor cultural properties, especially in light of potential interference with national sovereignty and an implied mistrust of States Parties. Herein lies a major challenge and opportunity for ICOMOS. While there will always be a need for the regular reporting of the condition of cultural properties by the States Parties themselves, there remains nevertheless a need for an independent and objective monitoring of these cultural properties of universal value.

For natural World Heritage Sites, the World Conservation Union (IUCN) provides just such a service, through its Commission on National Parks and the Protected Areas Data Unit (PADU). By the provision of experts and the maintenance of a data base on all protected areas, IUCN does a splendid monitoring job on behalf of the World Heritage Committee.

Why is it important for ICOMOS to develop the capacity to monitor world cultural sites? Because ICOMOS groups together national committees of experts in heritage conservation and management, experts who may act independently, beyond the reach of specific government policies and practices of the day. ICOMOS also has experts in the far-flung regions of the world, thereby allowing for on-the-spot monitoring of the condition of World Heritage Sites. Surely with the age of computers so fully upon us, ICOMOS can rise to the challenge of creating a network of experts who can use a common methodology to monitor the world's treasures.

The work of ICOMOS would, however, be enhanced by joining forces with ICCROM, which also has an official advisory role with the World Heritage Committee. Both organizations bring together highly qualified technical and scientific experts. Together, they could make a difference.

Will ICOMOS rise to this challenge? I sincerely hope so, for the future success of the World Heritage Convention depends on effective monitoring of World Heritage Sites to ensure their protection for this and future generations.

Dr Christina Cameron
PhD Environment Canada