

: DEVELOPING AN ETHICAL COMMITMENT STATEMENT FOR CONSERVATION PRACTITIONERS

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Over recent years, ICOMOS has examined options for developing an ethical practice statement for its members. Former ICOMOS President Roland Silva has been a particular champion of the need for such a document. Conferences and meetings of the Training and Education International Scientific Committee were especially relevant in developing this concept.

Several ICOMOS National Committees have already adopted their own ethical commitment statements. Many cultural and heritage organisations have developed such documents, in a variety of spheres of relevant professional interest, often focusing on competency standards as much as ethics per se.

Professional associations such as architects, have long required members to adhere to a code of professional conduct or code of ethics. A recent Survey of the legal and professional responsibilities of Conservators-Restorers as regards the other parties involved in the preservation and conservation of cultural heritage ii focuses on the legal aspects of each actor in the European conservation process and recommends to the European Commission the adoption of common guidelines and principles.

The desire to reposition and strengthen the ICOMOS network and to define its professional profile, led to a strategic review of its activities in 1997/8. This drew attention to the need for a unifying ethical commitment statement for ICOMOS members.

In 1998 ICOMOS adopted its first Strategic Plan 1999-2002, for its national and international scientific committees. First amongst six key goals was :

“To provide leadership in the conservation/preservation of the world’s cultural heritage”

The first of the strategies to achieve this goal was :

“1.1 To define and refine conservation/preservation philosophy, standards and practice by the development of charters, recommendations, guidelines and other statements of principle such as a code of ethics.”

A comprehensive examination of similar documents worldwide was undertaken. These ranged from the laws which have led to the legislative incorporation of ICOMOS in Sri Lanka to the by-laws of various professional institutes and programs such as certification and accreditation of peer professionals. The ICOMOS Education and Training ISC had examined competency standards and published training guidelines in 1993, as well as running a major conference on

the subject in association with ICOMOS Finland in 1995.

The Institute of Historic Building Conservation in the UK had also drafted extensive accreditation standards and practice guidelines by 1997.

When I began to prepare the first draft text of an ICOMOS Code of Ethics in late 1997, it seemed a dry and thankless task, but it gained momentum in Australia, since at that time various government instrumentalities were also beginning to devise formal accreditation processes for conservation professionals under state heritage laws. In late 1998, members of ICOMOS Spain proposed to the Advisory Committee meeting in Stockholm an “International document of adherence to the principles of ICOMOS rules of professional conduct”, focusing on explicit adherence to the World Heritage Convention and relevant Charters.

Thus, there were diverse needs emerging — could they be met in a single document, suitable for ICOMOS and exemplary for others?

What was not initially clear, was whether the ICOMOS document needed to:

- be a code of ethics or a code of conduct;
- define competency standards - following on the Guidelines on Education and Training, adopted in 1993;
- emphasise the need for open and transparent committees, per the Eger Charter;
- become an effective filter for full professional membership or include all members and interested groups;
- become doctrine for ratification at an ICOMOS General Assembly or be an issue for individual national or scientific committee decision;
- include recommendations for effectively managing any breaches.

In 1999 the first of a series of draft ethical commitment texts was presented to the ICOMOS Executive Committee for preliminary consideration.

Since that time there has been extensive debate and several versions of the document have been circulated for comment within and outside ICOMOS.

As the draft began to be circulated, initially there was much debate as to whether ICOMOS should be developing a Code of Conduct- outlining process and practice standards and their management; or a Code of Ethics — outlining the principles of professional duty, obligations, manners and self-discipline.

What seemed to be needed fell between these definitions, and thus the rather unwieldy title of Statement of Ethical Commitment for ICOMOS Members was created.>

Whilst the parent Venice Charter and its later descendants such as the Australia ICOMOS Burra Charter (revised 1999) define the principles and philosophy of conservation, not all nations and scientific committees have such documents, and it was strongly felt that general conservation principles were essential Statement basics.

There was also a need perceived for the setting of standards for professional practice- relationships to clients, colleagues and communities, recognising the culturally diverse values of every society in which ICOMOS members operate.

There was also a strong desire to clarify the commitment of members to uphold appropriate conservation standards. By defining these standards, and seeking the individual members acceptance of them, on a regular basis (perhaps via membership renewals), ICOMOS could take its rightful place amongst professional institutes that currently represent such formalised disciplinary groups as architects and planners.

There were initially 7 separate sections in the first draft statement, relating to:

- Members responsibilities
- Professional integrity
- Professional practice
- Professional competency
- Relationship with colleagues and clients
- Relationship with the community
- Review provisions

Meetings, conferences and much email traffic eventually removed the section by section approach, and reached several conclusions:

- Firstly, in the culturally diverse world of ICOMOS, the Statement needed to clearly define its terminology. A glossary of terms was essential to recognise the difficulties of translation inherent in key terms. For example, both the European use of “ monuments and sites “ and the more inclusive use of “ place “ needed explicit coverage;
- Secondly, the ICOMOS Statement needed to be a mix of both ethics and competency standards, and to refer to the common codes and Charters upon which ICOMOS practice and philosophy is based as well as to its world heritage role;
- Thirdly, the wider context social, economic and community context within which ICOMOS works needed to be clearly integrated;
- Fourthly, it was felt that an internationally adopted Statement was needed, whilst noting that national committees would be responsible for mediating breaches;

- Finally, that the Statement should be inspirational to members and non-members alike, to professionals and associated interests, and that it should form part of the basis on which professional members agreed to belong to ICOMOS.

Reflecting on these complexities, the Statement evolved into a series of 15 short articles, which outline member's obligations and responsibilities to the heritage of every community and of the world, as well as to their fellow members. It has been envisaged to be a useful statement of principles for ICOMOS members, other individuals and communities involved in conservation at all levels.

The principles encourage ethical outcomes, not only for the fabric of heritage places but for culturally diverse values as well, via consultation with wider interests via:

- multidisciplinary, shared decisions;
- documented decisions;
- decisions which are respectful of cultural diversity; and
- the promotion of cultural heritage and sustainability.

During the circulation process, input from many individual members and national committees has been invaluable. I wish particularly to note the input of the French and the Australian national ICOMOS committees and the ISC on Education and Training. Critical editorial support was contributed by Ray Bondin, Dinu Bumbaru, Andrew Hall, Barry Jones, Jean Louis Luxen, Duncan Marshall, Robert Moore, Michael Petzet, Ann Webster Smith and Yukk Yukhileto.

The draft Statement was debated and warmly approved by the ICOMOS Advisor Committee meeting in Dubrovnik in October 2001 (Attachment A). After final revision, it will be placed before the General Assembly in Madrid for ratification.

During this six year process it has become clear that ICOMOS member believe that as the heritage conservation profession has become better-recognised, members with individual disciplinary backgrounds as architects or archaeologists or planners, have crossed deliberately into a sphere of multi-disciplinary practice. There, the ethics of their original discipline have required adaptation in projects where inter-related disciplines meet and of necessity, meld.

No longer can an architect think only of the repair specification or design, but he or she works closely with the conservator, the planner, the archaeologist to formulate solutions to holistically conserve the monument or site, and refers to various disciplinary Charters, doctrines, benchmarks and standards that go beyond the original focus of any of these single disciplines. The conservator consults the archaeologist, the curator works closely with the town planner.

As a mature professional group, ICOMOS members have evolved or recognised common standards of approach to conservation issues, which whilst culturally diverse, are,

nevertheless, unifying in their principles.

Through the process of developing the Statement there also emerged a clear desire on behalf of ICOMOS members to use the formal processes of the document in recognition of the maturity of the conservation profession amongst peers and fellow professional groups. It is therefore proposed that the use of “post nominals” (to indicate full ICOMOS membership after a members name) will be enabled with the ratification of the ICOMOS Ethical Commitment Statement.

This will occur when individual ICOMOS members decide to formally agree to the Statement of Ethical Commitment. This will usually be done via their National Committee annual membership renewal, or when an individual first applies to be an ICOMOS member. Then, if the applicant is accepted to be suitably qualified and experienced to become a member, they may use the appellation/suffix (post nominals) “M.ICOMOS” after their name, to indicate their full membership of an ICOMOS Committee. Not all ICOMOS members will choose to do so. Associate, supporting or affiliated members there may prefer to simply know the standards of the organisation.

Naturally, the operational management of the Statement is dependent upon the willingness of National and International Scientific Committees to implement it. A particular contingent issue for committees to consider is the handling of breaches of the statement. Guidelines for the operational management of the Statement are attached for information, but do not form part of the Statement itself.

The Statement is proposed for review every six years, in line with ICOMOS Triennial work programs. How shall we test its performance?

- By its use?
- By its adoption?
- By its neglect?

If the Statement is relevant to conservation practice it will find its own place in the ICOMOS world, and beyond as a tool for testing our personal and professional commitment to the cause of heritage conservation.

End notes

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- i. New Zealand ICOMOS Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice 1994.
 - ii. APEL, 2001

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