

Adopting a Holistic Approach to Cultural and Natural Heritage Protection under the UNESCO World Heritage Convention

Roha W. Khalaf

Consultant architect and independent scholar

Contact: roha.khalaf@gmail.com

ORCID: <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-5779-7079>

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Abstract - Combining the protection of cultural and natural heritage of Outstanding Universal Value in one international treaty – the UNESCO World Heritage Convention – is an innovative achievement; however, the Operational Guidelines for its implementation separate the treatment of cultural and natural heritage. Authenticity in particular reinforces the culture/nature divide as it only applies to cultural properties and to the cultural aspects of mixed properties. This paper questions the practical utility of authenticity in heritage protection. It argues for adopting a holistic approach that brings together the multiple dimensions of heritage and proposes an alternative conceptual and operational framework: the dynamic triad of integrity-continuity-compatibility. This framework bridges the culture/nature divide, enables a more holistic protection of heritage and supports its role in meeting global challenges and agendas, notably sustainable development goals. The paper provides an original perspective on the future of heritage protection and is part of the author’s independent research, which gradually develops a practical policy proposal for the future implementation of the Convention.

Keywords - World Heritage Convention; future; holistic; protection; authenticity; integrity; continuity; compatibility

1 Introduction

The inclusion of cultural and natural heritage in one international treaty, i.e., the Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage, also known as the World Heritage Convention (UNESCO 1972), was an innovative achievement at a time of increasing threats to valued places worldwide (Cameron and Rössler 2013; Meskell 2018). It was “essential [...] to adopt new provisions in the form of a convention establishing an effective system of collective protection of the cultural and natural heritage of outstanding universal value, organized on a permanent basis [...]” (UNESCO 1972, Preamble, paragraph 8). The establishment of a system of collective protection is the *raison-d’être* of this Convention,¹ which was adopted in November 1972. It is “understood to mean the establishment of a system of international co-operation and assistance designed to support States Parties to the Convention in their efforts to conserve and identify that heritage” (UNESCO 1972, Article 7), and is “organized on a permanent basis”, i.e., at all times, therefore, whether at times of peace or war (UNESCO 1972, Preamble, paragraph 8).

In this system, States Parties² are expected to identify and nominate properties for inscription on the World Heritage List (WHL).³ The Advisory Bodies⁴ that evaluate nominations are expected to be “objective, rigorous, and scientific” (UNESCO 2021, paragraph 148(b)) and to make recommendations to the World Heritage Committee.⁵ This Committee decides on the basis of “objective and scientific considerations” whether properties qualify or not for inscription (UNESCO 2021, paragraph 23). To qualify, properties must be considered as having Outstanding Universal Value (OUV) (UNESCO 1972, Article 11.2).

The Committee, guided by the Advisory Bodies, develops and revises Operational Guidelines (OG)⁶ to oversee the implementation of the Convention. The OG define OUV as an exceptional cultural and/or natural significance from an international viewpoint (UNESCO 2021, paragraphs 49, 52). The OG explain that OUV is expressed through attributes, which are aspects or features of a property that can be cultural tangible (e.g., materials, substance), cultural intangible (e.g., traditions, use), or natural (e.g., ecological processes) (UNESCO 2021, paragraphs 82-95). To demonstrate OUV, a property must meet at least one OUV criterion, conditions of authenticity and/or integrity, and requirements for protection and management (UNESCO 2021, paragraphs 77, 78, 82, 88, 96). Unlike integrity, however, authenticity only applies to cultural properties and to the cultural aspects of mixed properties, which is why, this author would argue, it separates the treatment of cultural and natural heritage, thereby reinforcing the divide.⁷

¹ The Convention considers monuments, groups of buildings, and sites as cultural heritage; natural features, geological and physiographical formations, and natural sites as natural heritage (UNESCO 1972, Articles 1, 2).

² As of October 2020, 194 States Parties have ratified the Convention.

³ As of January 2023, the WHL contains a total of 1157 properties located across 167 States Parties: <https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/> Accessed 25 Jan 2023

⁴ Three Advisory Bodies are identified in the Convention: ICCROM, ICOMOS, and IUCN (UNESCO 1972, Article 8); however, only ICOMOS and IUCN evaluate nominations as noted in the OG (UNESCO 2021, paragraph 31(e)).

⁵ The Committee has decision-making autonomy and consists of representatives of twenty-one States Parties elected at a General Assembly. They usually serve a four-year term (UNESCO 2021, paragraph 21).

⁶ The Committee revised the OG almost thirty times since 1977 to reflect new concepts, knowledge, and experiences. The latest version, at the time of writing, was released in 2021. All the versions are available on the website of the UNESCO World Heritage Centre: <https://whc.unesco.org/en/guidelines/> Accessed 1 Oct 2022

⁷ The culture/nature divide has long been an issue of concern. In an attempt to bridge this divide, the Committee recognized cultural landscapes as a category of property in 1992; it adopted the Global Strategy for a representative, balanced and credible WHL in 1994; it revised the wording of the OUV criteria over the years; it merged the six cultural criteria and four natural criteria into one set of ten criteria in 2005; and it supported the joint ICOMOS-IUCN

The term “integrity” does not appear in the text of the Convention, but its practical utility in heritage protection is obvious from the outset. It is understood that a State Party should protect the wholeness and intactness of the cultural and natural heritage situated on its territory and prevent or reduce the risk of “damage or destruction” or “deterioration or disappearance of any item” (UNESCO 1972, Preamble, paragraphs 1, 2, see also Article 5). Clearly, the “serious and specific dangers” such as “armed conflict; calamities and cataclysms; serious fires, earthquakes, landslides; volcanic eruptions; changes in water level, floods and tidal waves” can have deleterious effects on the integrity of a cultural or natural World Heritage property (UNESCO 1972, Article 11.4). Therefore, integrity is a practical and useful reference for heritage protection and for the processes of monitoring specified in the OG, namely reactive monitoring and periodic reporting.⁸

In fact, representatives of the Advisory Bodies, namely the International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS) and the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), recommended integrity for the nomination of both cultural and natural properties at the first preparatory meeting organized by UNESCO in Morges, Switzerland, in 1976. It was retained for natural properties, but at the following meeting in Paris, France, in 1977, it was replaced with authenticity for cultural properties (UNESCO 1976, Annex 3; UNESCO 1977a, paragraphs 18, 21; see also Stovel 2008, pp. 10-12). Four out of the six attributes of integrity that were recommended in 1976 – i.e., design, materials, workmanship, and setting, excluding function and condition – became the attributes of authenticity in the OG in 1977 (UNESCO 1977b, paragraph 9). It was not until 2005 that integrity became a requirement for the nomination of cultural and mixed properties in addition to authenticity (UNESCO 2005, paragraphs 82, 87).

Curiously, the words “authentic” and “true” are used once in the text of the Convention to describe its two “copies” (UNESCO 1972, Article 38), but the *practical utility* of authenticity in *heritage protection* is not obvious in the text. The World Heritage Committee operationalized authenticity in 1977 nonetheless, especially because the president of ICOMOS at the time, Raymond Lemaire, believed authenticity was “of great practical utility in conservation” and insisted on its use in the OG (Stovel 2004, pp. 7, 8; see also Gfeller 2017, p. 765). To this day, however, the difficulty of assessing authenticity for different categories of properties⁹ challenges this belief. For example, “historic towns which are still inhabited”¹⁰ were identified as a category of property in the 1987¹¹ version of the OG and defined as towns “which, by their very nature,

“Connecting Practice” project from 2013 onwards, but the divide persists in the implementation of the Convention. An integrated and holistic approach that effectively brings together cultural and natural heritage to allow for the recognition of a more holistic range of values and culture-nature interlinkages is yet to be introduced in the OG. The alternative conceptual and operational framework proposed in this paper bridges the divide, as will be shown later.

⁸ Reactive monitoring applies to specific World Heritage properties that are under threat whereas periodic reporting is a more regular monitoring process led by the States Parties and serves many purposes, including to record the changing circumstances and state of conservation of properties (UNESCO 2021, paragraphs 169-176, 199-210).

⁹ The Committee has defined specific categories (types) of cultural and natural properties in the OG, including cultural landscapes, historic towns and town centres, heritage canals, and heritage routes (UNESCO 2019, Annex 3).

¹⁰ Historic towns and town centres (also known as groups of buildings under Article 1 of the Convention) fall into three categories: (i) towns which are no longer inhabited, (ii) historic towns which are still inhabited, and (iii) new towns of the twentieth century (UNESCO 1987, paragraphs 24-31; 2019, Annex 3 pp. 84-86).

¹¹ In October of the same year, the Charter for the Conservation of Historic Towns and Urban Areas (Washington Charter) was adopted by the ICOMOS General Assembly. The Charter does not address the assessment of authenticity; it simply states that any threat to the qualities that express the character of a historic town or urban area would compromise its authenticity (ICOMOS 1987, Article 2), but this author would argue that a potential threat may rather compromise its integrity and the continuity of its character. Integrity and continuity are defined and discussed later in the paper.

have developed and will continue to develop under the influence of socio-economic and cultural change, *a situation that renders the assessment of their authenticity more difficult and any conservation policy more problematical*” (UNESCO 1987, paragraph 24(ii), *emphasis added*). This definition remained unchanged in the OG from 1987 to 2019, i.e., for 32 years (UNESCO 2019, Annex 3). Instead of finding a solution to this situation or questioning the usefulness of assessing authenticity for heritage protection and potentially for sustainable development, the entire definition was deleted – and without substitution – in the OG in 2021 (UNESCO 2021).

This paper questions the practical utility of authenticity in heritage protection, knowing that it separates the treatment of cultural and natural heritage. The paper argues for adopting a holistic approach that brings together the multiple dimensions of heritage and proposes an alternative conceptual and operational framework. This framework bridges the culture/nature divide, enables a more holistic protection of heritage and supports its role in meeting global challenges and agendas, notably sustainable development goals. The paper was prepared for the McGill-Sapienza Seminar, Heritage in War and Peace II, held in Montreal on 2-4 November 2022. It is in keeping with the seminar’s objective of finding innovative solutions and policy responses for better protection of cultural and natural sites in the future, both in peacetime and wartime. Indeed, as these sites are increasingly threatened with loss and damage, “creating better frameworks of heritage protection becomes a necessity” – to borrow the words of the Editors of this volume, Mastandrea Bonaviri and Sadowski.¹² Drawing on document analysis and scholarly literature from the field of heritage studies, the paper first builds the case against authenticity and then clarifies why the dynamic triad of integrity-continuity-compatibility is a better conceptual and operational framework. In doing so, it makes an original and significant contribution to the future of heritage protection under the UNESCO World Heritage Convention.

2 The Case Against Authenticity

The evolution of authenticity in the World Heritage context and the roles played by ICOMOS pioneers and experts from different States Parties (notably Canada, Norway and Japan) in its international re-elaboration are well documented (e.g., Stovel 2008; Cameron and Rössler 2013; Kono 2014; Gfeller 2017), which is why this section does not delve into these issues in detail. Rather, its purpose is to show that authenticity is not a useful concept for heritage protection and it focuses on cultural heritage because the OG do not apply authenticity to natural heritage. First, this section shows that the assessment of authenticity as set out in the OG is impractical, inconsistent and can be challenged over time. Second, it reveals that another concept is put into practice instead to justify the qualification of properties for inscription on the WHL as evidenced in several Statements of OUV (SOUVs). Finally, it considers global challenges and agendas to highlight the need for an alternative conceptual and operational framework applicable to both cultural and natural heritage.

2.1 Authenticity in the Operational Guidelines

Authenticity in the OG is, to a large extent, discussed in relation to nomination rather than protection. According to the 1977 version, a cultural property nominated for inscription on the WHL has to “meet the test of authenticity in design, materials, workmanship *and* setting”

¹² https://slsa.ac.uk/images/2022winter/Heritage_in_War_and_Peace_publication.pdf Accessed 19 June 2022

(UNESCO 1977b, paragraph 9, *emphasis added*). These four attributes were selected in light of the International Charter for the Conservation and Restoration of Monuments and Sites, also known as the Venice Charter, which focuses on the preservation of the tangible aspects of ancient monuments and sites with aesthetic and historic value (ICOMOS 1964, Article 9). This Charter is not in favor of “All reconstruction work”, stating that it should be “ruled out ‘a priori’” (ICOMOS 1964, Article 15) because it is believed to lack “authenticity” (ICOMOS 1964, Preamble). Despite this fact, ICOMOS recommended the inscription of the reconstructed Historic Centre of Warsaw, Poland, in 1980, but advised the World Heritage Committee that “authenticity might not be applied in its strict sense” (Cameron and Rössler 2013, p. 41). The Committee inscribed the property and amended the test of authenticity in the OG, replacing “and” with “or” while adding that “reconstruction is only acceptable if it is carried out on the basis of complete and detailed documentation on the original and to no extent on conjecture” (UNESCO 1980, paragraph 18(b)).

In 1992, the Committee recognized cultural landscapes as a category of property and, in 1994, amended the test of authenticity adding “distinctive character and components” to the list of attributes (UNESCO 1994, paragraph 24(b)(i)). That year, the Nara Document on Authenticity was conceived in the spirit of the Venice Charter and drafted at a conference in Japan (ICOMOS 1994). Unlike the Venice Charter, however, it brings into focus the world’s cultural diversity and the intangible aspects of heritage, such as traditions. The ICOMOS General Assembly held in Mexico, in 1999, approved this document, which, as a result, “became part of the corpus of reference texts of ICOMOS” (Kono 2014, p. 450). Arguably, it was inconvenient at this point to replace authenticity with integrity in the OG, although ICOMOS entertained this idea a year earlier for the purpose of applying one common approach to cultural and natural heritage. Indeed, at an expert meeting held in Amsterdam in 1998, the representative of ICOMOS “agreed with IUCN that the ‘test of authenticity’ could be replaced by ‘conditions of integrity’” (UNESCO World Heritage Centre in Association with the Government of the Netherlands 1998, p. 3). However, the difference between the two concepts was not clarified,¹³ and authenticity was never replaced with integrity to abolish the formal distinction between cultural and natural heritage in the OG.

Instead, meeting the “conditions of integrity” became an additional requirement for the nomination of cultural and mixed properties in addition to meeting the (renamed) “conditions of authenticity,” but not until 2005 (UNESCO 2005, paragraphs 87, 82). The attributes proposed in the Nara Document, such as use, traditions, and spirit (ICOMOS 1994, Article 13), and those proposed during an expert meeting held in Zimbabwe in 2000, such as management systems and language (Saouma-Forero 2001), were added to the 2005 version of the OG as well (UNESCO 2005, paragraph 82). To this day, eight paragraphs are dedicated to authenticity, including passages from the Nara Document, which is also entirely annexed to the OG (UNESCO 2005, 2021, paragraphs 79-86, Annex 4).

Yet, neither the Nara Document nor the OG define the term “authenticity.” The OG merely state that “properties *may be* understood to meet the conditions of authenticity if their cultural

¹³ It is worth noting here that some scholars have later attempted to clarify the difference between the two concepts. For example, Stovel (2007, p. 21) suggested that “authenticity may be understood as the ability of a property to convey its significance over time, and integrity understood as the ability of a property to secure or sustain its significance over time.” However, one may argue that if a cultural property is able to secure or sustain its significance, it is, logically, able to convey it in the first place. Therefore, following this logic, integrity renders authenticity redundant. In fact, the word “convey” is used in the OG to define integrity (UNESCO 2021, paragraphs 88(b), 89). In this author’s view, integrity may be understood as the ability of a cultural or natural property to both convey and sustain its significance through the continuity of the attributes of OUV and other values (which may change over time) – and this is clarified later in the paper.

values (as recognized in the nomination criteria proposed) are truthfully and credibly expressed through a variety of attributes” (UNESCO 2021, paragraph 82, *emphasis added*). However, values are not fixed because, for example, people may ascribe different values in the future, which is why, in this author’s view, *an assessment of authenticity can be challenged over time*. Moreover, the OG admit that “Attributes such as spirit and feeling do not lend themselves easily to practical applications of the conditions of authenticity” (UNESCO 2021, paragraph 83), thereby implying that authenticity is an *impractical* concept. It is therefore difficult for a State Party to “assess the degree to which authenticity is present in, or expressed by” such intangible attributes if they are considered in preparing a nomination (UNESCO 2021, paragraph 85). One would have to wonder as well how ICOMOS can be consistently “objective, rigorous, and scientific” in its evaluation of nominations of cultural properties, including reconstructed ones (UNESCO 2021, para. 148(b)).

Speaking of reconstruction, it must be observed that the Nara Document is not acknowledged in the only paragraph dedicated to this issue in the OG, which reads as follows: “In relation to authenticity, reconstruction of archaeological remains or historic buildings or districts is justifiable only in exceptional circumstances. Reconstruction is acceptable only on the basis of complete and detailed documentation and to no extent on conjecture” (UNESCO 2021, paragraph 86). The latter brings into focus tangible attributes, in accordance with the Venice Charter, which is problematic because: if authenticity may be understood as the truthful and credible expression of values through attributes and if, for example, the values of a reconstructed property are truthfully and credibly expressed through the recovery and continuity of *intangible attributes* such as use and traditions – i.e., if the continuity of use and traditions is what *conveys its significance* – then basing authenticity judgements on the complete and detailed documentation of its physical fabric and therefore tangible attributes such as materials and substance would be irrelevant. This is not to say that documentation is needless,¹⁴ but to show the *inconsistency* surrounding the assessment of authenticity and, potentially, the decision as to whether a property qualifies or not for inscription on the WHL. Moreover, the *widespread destruction of heritage at a global scale* due to natural hazard-related disasters (exacerbated by climate change) and armed conflicts or war, for example, in Iraq, Syria, Yemen, Libya, and Ukraine, is certainly devastating – but these “circumstances” are recurrent and, therefore, are not so “exceptional” as noted in the OG (UNESCO 2021, para. 86).

One would have to wonder how a “system of collective protection” is expected to be “effective” in accordance with the text of the Convention (UNESCO 1972, Preamble, paragraph 8) if a core concept for its implementation is not clearly defined and applied in a consistent and practical manner. Authenticity presents many problems, undermining not only the future effective protection and management of properties, but also the credibility of the WHL (1st C)¹⁵ (UNESCO 2021, paragraph 26.1). In fact, the credibility of the overall system is at risk because several Statements of OUV (SOUVs) show that authenticity is not actually the core concept that is put into practice to justify the qualification of properties for inscription on the WHL.

2.2 Authenticity in Statements of Outstanding Universal Value

According to the OG, a State Party has to propose/write a SOUV in order to nominate a cultural or natural property for inscription on the WHL. Its purpose is to “make clear” why the nominated

¹⁴ The need for documentation is clarified later in this paper.

¹⁵ For clarification, the Committee has adopted five strategic objectives, also known as the “5Cs,” to facilitate the implementation of the Convention: credibility (1st C), conservation (2nd C), capacity-building (3rd C), communication (4th C), and communities (5th C).

property qualifies for inscription (UNESCO 2021, paragraph 132.3); in other words, its purpose is to demonstrate OUV. The SOUV follows a standard format designed by the International Centre for the Study of the Preservation and Restoration of Cultural Property (ICCROM) and approved by the World Heritage Committee. It comprises a brief synthesis, a justification for inscription under one or more criteria, a statement of integrity, a statement of authenticity (not applicable to natural properties), and a statement on protection and management (UNESCO 2021, paragraph 155). If the property is cultural, ICOMOS evaluates its nomination and makes recommendations to the Committee. The Committee may adopt the SOUV with or without amendments if it decides to inscribe the property. The SOUV is an official text (often displayed on the website of the UNESCO World Heritage Centre) that explains why a property is considered as having OUV. Once adopted, the State Party is expected to use it as “the key reference for the future effective protection and management of the property” (UNESCO 2021, paragraph 51).

To this day, it must be observed, “the statement of authenticity is still the weakest part of any SOUV” – to borrow the words of an ICCROM expert (Wijesuriya 2018, p. 21). In fact, several SOUVs show that cultural properties were inscribed on the WHL not because their attributes “truthfully and credibly” express OUV in accordance with the OG (UNESCO 2021, paragraph 82), but because the *continuity* of their attributes expresses OUV. This paper defines continuity and explains its relevance to both cultural and natural heritage later, but it is important to show here that this concept underpins SOUVs, which are used by States Parties as key references for the future protection and management of properties. Many States Parties have relied on this concept and related terms (e.g., exist, ongoing, keep, maintain, retain, sustain) in statements of authenticity, as documented in this author’s previous work (Khalaf 2020a, pp. 247-248, Appendix A). Upon close scrutiny, these statements show that continuity is actually the core concept that justifies the qualification of properties for inscription on the WHL. Continuity appears to be what World Heritage institutions really look for, such as continuity of design, materials, form, traditions, spirit, feeling, or use, although this is never admitted as some scholars have argued (Brumann 2021, chapter 7). Unlike authenticity, it is a practical concept that applies more easily to the categories of cultural heritage identified in the text of the Convention and the OG (UNESCO 1972, Article 1, UNESCO 2019, Annex 3). It applies to living and evolving properties, such as inhabited historic towns, as well as other (more static) properties such as monuments and archaeological sites whose attributes must be retained because the continuity of these attributes expresses OUV, as documented by this author for the period 1978-2019 (Khalaf 2020a, Appendix A). Three different statements of authenticity, adopted in 2021, are shown below to further support this claim. Each one represents a category of property as set out in Article 1 of the Convention – a monument; a group of buildings; a site – and, to be more representative, each one is from a different UNESCO World Heritage region – Europe and North America; Arab States; Asia and the Pacific. The statements show that the identified attributes, whether tangible or intangible, are rather *attributes of continuity* than authenticity:

Cordouan Lighthouse:

“[...] *continues* to be used [...] Its authenticity must [...] be assessed in the light of its role as an *active* maritime signalling unit [...] undergoing a process of technical modernisation in order to *maintain* its activity.”¹⁶ (*emphasis added*)

¹⁶A *monument* in France, inscribed under criteria (i)(iv). Continuity is embedded in the justification for inscription: <https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/1625> Accessed 1 Oct 2022.

As-Salt-The Place of Tolerance and Urban Hospitality:

“[...] meets the conditions of authenticity through the *continuity* of the different elements of the city’s architecture and urban morphology, and in the *continuing* aspects of the traditions of hospitality. [...] the authenticity is supported by the *retention* of the networks of public spaces [...] and the *continuity* of use of many of the public buildings and spaces [...]”¹⁷ (*emphasis added*)

Cultural Landscape of Hawraman/Uramanat:

“[...] the villages and the public space features, such as public rooftops, *continue* to be dominant. Most historic buildings have *kept* their traditional form and design [...]. Traditional dry-stone terracing and water management practices are *retained* and *practiced* [...]”¹⁸ (*emphasis added*)

Admittedly, the Nara Document does not use the term continuity, but this document has in fact broadened the “initial focus on the *material continuity* that was privileging cultural heritage built with durable materials such as stone, mostly in Europe, to include in the World Heritage List cultural heritage built with less durable ones, such as earth and wood in other regions, for example Africa or Asia, where people attach value to *immaterial continuity* – hence, the addition of traditions, spirit, feeling, use, function, and other intangible attributes in the Operational Guidelines,” thereby recognizing, and promoting respect for, cultural diversity (Khalaf 2021a, p. 381, *original emphasis*). The Nara Document was drafted at a conference “held in the vicinity of the monuments of the ancient capital city of Nara” (Gfeller 2017, p. 780), and four years later, the Historic Monuments of Ancient Nara were inscribed on the WHL. It is noteworthy that the statement of authenticity in the SOUV shows in relation to the Nara Palace Site: “The *continuity* of traditional architecture in Japan [...] has ensured that the reconstructed buildings have a high level of authenticity in form and design. The State Party is currently addressing how to best *maintain* that *continuity* in ongoing reconstruction work [...]”¹⁹ (*emphasis added*). Although authenticity is mentioned, it is redundant because form and design are obviously *attributes of continuity*. The reconstructed buildings at the Nara Palace Site were deemed acceptable and included in the WHL because of the continuity of traditional architecture in Japan and, therefore, the continuity of traditional form and design. The operational concept that justifies the qualification of reconstruction is actually continuity. This observation brings into question the relevance and practical utility of authenticity in the World Heritage system, which should be questioned and, eventually, abandoned, especially in view of global challenges and agendas.

2.3 Authenticity in the Broader Context of Global Challenges and Agendas

The United Nations Sustainable Development Summit adopted the 2030 Agenda with its 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and 169 targets in 2015 (UN 2015).²⁰ A few months later,

¹⁷ A *group of buildings* in Jordan, criteria (ii)(iii): <https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/689> Accessed 1 Oct 2022

¹⁸ A serial property of two *sites* in Iran, criteria (iii)(v): <https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/1647> Accessed 1 Oct 2022

¹⁹ The temples and shrines constitute a *group of buildings*, and the Nara Palace Site, the Kasuga-Taisha Compound, and the Kasugayama Primeval Forest are *sites*, as set out in Article 1 of the Convention. This cultural property is in Japan and was inscribed under criteria (ii)(iii)(iv)(vi): <https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/870> Accessed 1 Oct 2022

²⁰ The 2030 Agenda was later strategically linked to the New Urban Agenda (Habitat III), which is of particular relevance to World Heritage cities; however, this paper focuses on the 2030 Agenda, which is mentioned in the OG.

the General Assembly of States Parties to the World Heritage Convention adopted a policy for the integration of a sustainable development perspective into the processes of the Convention (UNESCO 2015). As a result, States Parties are now encouraged to mainstream the principles of that policy and those of the 2030 Agenda into their protection and management systems (UNESCO 2021, paragraphs 14bis, 15(o), 132.5). This includes climate action (SDG 13),²¹ especially because climate change is a significant challenge, “the fastest-growing threat to World Heritage globally” (Markham 2021, p.38).²²

To address this threat, the ICOMOS Climate Change and Heritage Working Group (2019, p.16) prepared a comprehensive report, noting that “Modifications will be required, both to better position heritage as an asset in climate action and to address the anticipated impacts of climate change [...] Many conservation management and assessment standards, such as the constructs of authenticity [...] will need to be rethought.” One may argue that retaining authenticity itself to be rethought in the first place. As this author has explained elsewhere, the assessment of authenticity should be abandoned because, in summary, it is not the authenticity of heritage at one point in time that contributes to climate action and SDGs; it is the *continuity* of heritage and its ability to adapt to *change over time*. For example, the continuity of building cultures and traditional knowledge systems can help build the resilience of cities (SDG 11) and help them adapt to climate change (SDG 13) (Khalaf 2021a, p. 379).

Heritage is in fact a dynamic manifestation of continuities and changes over time. Indeed, heritage is evolving and adaptive: it evolves in response to people’s needs for continuity and change over time and adapts to new conditions and circumstances. Even the spirit of place “responds to the needs for change and continuity of communities,” as noted in the Québec Declaration on the Preservation of the Spirit of Place, a key document in which authenticity does not appear (ICOMOS 2008, Article 3).

It is precisely because of its dynamic and adaptive capacity that heritage can contribute to future-making and to creating potential benefits for people under changing (climatic) conditions (Holtorf 2020). Recent publications implicitly propose abandoning authenticity because its assessment works against this dynamism. For example, a White Paper on cultural heritage and climate change argues “cultural heritage is often positioned as a brake on innovation and adaptation, through the mistaken belief that authenticity resides in faithful and unvarying reproduction of cultural heritage over time; but this view reflects a failure to understand and appreciate the dynamism, flexibility, and adaptive capacity of all forms of cultural heritage” (Joint Programming Initiative (JPI) Cultural Heritage and JPI Climate 2022, p.16). Another example is the 134-page long policy guidance prepared by the ICOMOS Sustainable Development Goals Working Group (2021) in which the notions of integrity and continuity appear in specific policy statements, but the notion of authenticity does not appear at all. The Nara and Nara+20 Documents are simply mentioned in the bibliography. It is noteworthy that the main author (the task team coordinator) acknowledges, in a separate book, the need for “deeper reflection on whether ‘authenticity’ is a relevant concept or whether it should be *discarded*” (Labadi 2022, p. 193, *emphasis added*).

Admittedly, discarding a concept embedded in the OG since the 1970s can be difficult.

²¹ Climate action or “Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts” (SDG 13) is fundamental to achieving many SDGs that have explicit targets for building climate resilience and/or reducing greenhouse gas emissions, such as SDG 1, Target 1.5; SDG 2, Target 2.4; SDG 11, Target 11.b (UN 2015).

²² Extreme weather events, sea level rise, flooding, wildfires, drought, desertification, erosion, coral bleaching, species migration, and loss of biodiversity are among the consequences of climate change facing cultural and natural heritage.

ICOMOS takes the lead in fostering the Convention's conceptual development with regard to cultural heritage and, arguably, ICOMOS will not want to see the vocabulary of authenticity disappear, but this concept should be abandoned nonetheless because it lacks practical utility, as shown in this section. More practical and relevant concepts are needed, especially to enable a more holistic protection of both cultural and natural heritage and to contribute to SDGs.

3 The Dynamic Triad of Integrity-Continuity-Compatibility

The purpose of this section is to present a better conceptual and operational framework than authenticity. It presents three concepts and shows their relation to one another, to heritage protection, and to sustainable development. First, it revisits the concept of integrity and argues for broadening its definition in the OG. Second, it links integrity to the concepts of continuity and compatibility while defining them and highlighting their relevance to the implementation of the Convention. Finally, it clarifies how this triad, which is dynamic, can become operational.

3.1 Integrity in the Operational Guidelines

Integrity is defined in the OG as “a measure of the wholeness and intactness of the natural and/or cultural heritage and its attributes” (UNESCO 2021, paragraph 88). At first glance, it may seem that this definition encompasses all the identified values and attributes of a property, but, in fact, only its OUV and attributes matter. This is made clear in a World Heritage resource manual, which explains “It is not necessary within the nomination to consider attributes irrelevant to the potential Outstanding Universal Value of the property [...] Integrity is a measure of the completeness or intactness of the attributes that convey Outstanding Universal Value” (UNESCO, ICCROM, ICOMOS and IUCN 2011, pp. 64-65). A State Party can therefore ignore other values, attributes and culture-nature interlinkages even though they can be relevant to the people who live in or around a property, notably local communities and Indigenous Peoples. As a result, the protection and management system of the property cannot be holistic. Linking universal and local values in World Heritage properties remains a challenge (de Merode, Smeets, and Westrik eds 2004), and in this author's view, it remains a challenge because the understanding of integrity in the World Heritage system is limited to OUV (UNESCO, ICCROM, ICOMOS and IUCN 2011, pp. 64-65).

As noted earlier in this paper, integrity is a useful and practical reference for heritage protection and for monitoring the state of conservation of any property, but it is not currently an effective reference because its understanding is limited to OUV. This limitation is not actually in keeping with the text of the Convention,²³ especially Article 5 (UNESCO 1972), which implies that each State Party should protect and conserve the integrity of the cultural and natural heritage situated on its territory, including OUV if it is later ascribed – rather than protect OUV, including integrity as per the OG (UNESCO 2021, paragraph 96). For this reason, the definition of integrity in the OG should be broadened beyond OUV to include *all* the values, attributes and culture-nature interlinkages within a property identified by a wider scope of stakeholders and rights-holders, notably local communities and Indigenous Peoples. This revision in the OG would better reflect

²³ The website of the UNESCO World Heritage Centre clarifies that by signing the Convention, each State Party pledges to protect its national heritage (cultural and natural heritage in its entirety): <https://whc.unesco.org/en/convention/> Accessed 1 Oct 2022

the meaning of integrity as “the state of being whole and not divided”²⁴ (wholeness and intactness), and this is the key to linking universal and local values, bridging the culture/nature divide, and enabling a more holistic protection of heritage, which should be understood and treated as an integrated whole.

If the multiple dimensions of heritage – tangible, intangible, cultural, and natural – are brought together under integrity in the OG, heritage as a whole can better contribute to meeting global challenges and agendas. Also, recognizing in the OG that the integrity of heritage is a dynamic, evolving, and adaptive entity would enable a future-oriented approach to heritage management so that States Parties may better deal with potential risks, threats or losses and, moreover, deliver SDGs and create potential benefits for people (Khalaf 2022a). For example, re-establishing the integrity of heritage after armed conflict or war through reconstruction is an option among others that could potentially regenerate livelihoods (SDG 8), alleviate poverty (SDG 1), and enhance well-being (SDG 3) (Khalaf 2020b). Admittedly, destruction symbolizes the failure of protection, which can be devastating (International Criminal Court (ICC) 2021), but loss is not necessarily the end of heritage. For instance, the property “Cultural Landscape and Archaeological Remains of the Bamiyan Valley” was inscribed on the WHL *after* the destruction of the Buddha statues. Despite this loss to its integrity, the SOUV indicates that the property “continues to express its Outstanding Universal Value in terms of form and materials, location and setting.”²⁵ This example shows that loss does not necessarily disqualify a property from being inscribed on the WHL. It also shows that integrity is a dynamic manifestation of continuities and changes, including losses, over time – rather than a static physical entity frozen in time as implied in the OG (UNESCO 2021, paragraph 88).

Heritage protection does not occur in a static environment. Values, including OUV, attributes, people’s perceptions and needs, site conditions, and circumstances can change, which is why the definition of integrity in the OG should be revised to acknowledge both continuity and change. In revising its definition, honesty should be included because integrity may also be understood as “the quality of being honest”²⁶. Honesty is important for the legibility of an intervention, to prevent deception or misinterpretation. It is in fact a heritage conservation principle. For example, the Standards and Guidelines for the Conservation of Historic Places in Canada explain that interventions should be “compatible with the historic place and identifiable [...] the main reason for making interventions identifiable is honesty” (Parks Canada 2010, pp. 22, 32). “Date stamping” or “subtle visual means” are some effective indicators of honesty (Parks Canada 2010, p. 32), but, in this author’s view, interpretive strategies and indicators that engage different human senses, such as guided tours and story-telling, can also be effective. For example, they can identify a reconstruction by distinguishing it from the original and help the public understand the history and significance of a place. Indeed, conservation professionals have an ethical responsibility to respect the past in their present interventions while being accountable to the future. They should consider evidence from all available sources and render a reconstruction identifiable to prevent deceiving and misleading the public and future generations. In doing so, they are in fact maintaining honesty (rather than achieving authenticity). Honesty is actually implied in the Venice Charter through the words “distinct,” “distinguishable” and “recognizable” (i.e., identifiable) although the Charter expects this distinction to be self-evident from the

²⁴ https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/american_english/integrity Accessed 1 Oct 2022

²⁵ This category of property, as set out in Article 1 of the Convention, is a *site*, in Afghanistan, inscribed under criteria (i)(ii)(iii)(iv)(vi): <https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/208> Accessed 1 Oct 2022

²⁶ https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/american_english/integrity Accessed 1 Oct 2022

appearance of an intervention and overlooks other, less visual and tangible, indicators of honesty (ICOMOS 1964, Articles 9, 12, 15). Other important conservation principles are continuity and compatibility.

3.2 Continuity and Compatibility in the Implementation of the Convention

The meaning of continuity may seem clear, but is defined here nonetheless to make an important clarification. In dictionary terms, continuity means “The unbroken and consistent existence or operation of something over time.”²⁷ However, in heritage conservation terms, continuity should be understood as fluid rather than timeless or “unbroken” to accommodate change. Indeed, values, and attributes, people’s perceptions and needs may change over time. Both continuity and change are part of the dynamism of heritage.

It is noteworthy that the concept of continuity is in keeping with the text of the Convention, especially because each State Party should ensure the “transmission to future generations of the cultural and natural heritage” situated on its territory (UNESCO 1972, Article 4). Transmission, of course, involves continuity over time. This concept applies equally to cultural heritage and natural heritage. In fact, IUCN stressed “the need for [natural] sites to have sufficient size to contain all or most of the key elements related to significance and continuity” at the first preparatory meeting organized by UNESCO in 1976 (Cameron and Rössler 2013, p. 42). Continuity, as shown earlier in this paper, also applies to cultural heritage and its attributes, i.e., continuity of form, design, materials, substance, use, function, traditions, etc. Moreover, although the notion itself does not appear in the wording of the OUV criteria, continuity is implied, for example, in criteria (iii) “cultural tradition [...] which is living”, (v) “human interaction”, (vi) “living traditions”, (viii) “on-going geological processes”, and (ix) “on-going ecological and biological processes” (UNESCO 2021, paragraph 77). Continuity is also implied in the UNESCO definition of heritage: “Heritage is our legacy from the past, what we live with today, and what we pass on to future generations.”²⁸

In concert with integrity, continuity can maintain culture-nature interlinkages, also known as “the indissoluble bonds between culture and nature,” which can be of great significance to Indigenous Peoples in particular, for example in Pimachiowin Aki, Canada.²⁹ As this author has argued and elaborated elsewhere, operationalizing the concept of continuity can facilitate the application of people-centred and human rights based approaches to heritage protection and management so that local communities and Indigenous Peoples may continue to interact with their cultural and natural environment, to access their heritage and actively protect and manage it, and transmit it to future generations (Khalaf 2021b). The transmission of their traditional knowledge, building cultures, practices and skills can contribute to SDGs, such as strengthening the resilience of cities and human settlements (SDG 11) and combatting climate change (SDG 13). Continuity, therefore, is a practical and useful concept that supports the role of heritage in meeting global challenges and agendas; however, it should be understood as fluid rather than timeless to accommodate change.

²⁷ <https://www.lexico.com/definition/continuity> Accessed 1 Oct 2022

²⁸ <https://whc.unesco.org/en/about/> Accessed 1 Oct 2022.

²⁹ A cultural landscape and mixed site, inscribed under criteria (iii)(vi)(ix). The SOUV relies heavily on continuity: <https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/1415> Accessed 1 Oct 2022

Proposals for change in particular, such as interventions and development projects, should be “compatible,” which in dictionary terms means “capable of existing together in harmony.”³⁰ Accordingly, a proposal for change is compatible if it is capable of existing together in harmony with cultural or natural heritage, i.e., if it does not adversely affect heritage and respects its integrity and the continuity of values and attributes. Therefore, in conservation terms, the concept of compatibility may be understood as the harmonious coexistence or harmonious integration of change with heritage. It is a useful concept for establishing the limits of acceptable change on a case-by-case basis. A State Party should carry out an impact assessment to identify and evaluate potential impacts (Court, Jo, Mackay, Murai, and Therivel 2022) in order to determine compatibility and decide if a proposal for change (e.g., a new building, a bridge, a road, a reconstruction, a hydroelectric project) should proceed or not. Ideally, in this author’s view, the State Party should balance the need to conserve integrity and the need to allow change that benefits people while contributing to environmental sustainability and climate action. For example, a proposed development project should respect the integrity of a property and the continuity of values and attributes by introducing compatible designs, forms, materials, or uses, and other changes that are climate-conscious (low carbon, energy-efficient, resilient).

Despite its relevance to heritage protection and sustainable development, compatibility is not mentioned in the OG. Introducing and operationalizing this concept would be useful to clarify, for example, paragraph 172, which asks States Parties to inform the Committee of their intention to undertake or to authorize new constructions that may affect OUV “so that the Committee may assist in seeking appropriate solutions” (UNESCO 2021), i.e., compatible solutions.

Although the term “compatible” or “harmonious” does not appear in the text of the Convention, the practical utility of this concept is evident, for example, in Article 5(a) because by integrating “the protection of [cultural and natural] heritage into comprehensive planning programmes” a State Party can prevent incompatible change, such as land uses or development projects proposed within the boundaries of a property, its buffer zone or wider setting that may adversely affect the property’s integrity, OUV and other values (UNESCO 1972). The importance of this concept is also clear in UNESCO and ICOMOS documents, such as the Venice Charter: “replacements of missing parts must integrate *harmoniously* with the whole” (ICOMOS 1964, Article 12, *emphasis added*). Another notable example is the Recommendation on the Historic Urban Landscape: “Special emphasis should be placed on the *harmonious* integration of contemporary interventions into the historic urban fabric” (UNESCO 2011, Item 22, *emphasis added*). Other examples are given elsewhere (Khalaf 2020c, pp. 391-392). This concept also appears in the guidance and toolkit for impact assessments in a World Heritage context; however, in this author’s view, a proposed action or intervention should be compatible with *all* the identified values of a World Heritage property, not only “compatible with the OUV” as noted in the guidance (Court, Jo, Mackay, Murai, and Therivel 2022, p. 18). This is important to ensure a more holistic protection of heritage. It must be observed, moreover, that both compatibility and continuity are recurring concepts in several SOUVs not only under statements of authenticity, but also integrity, which are sometimes fused together, as documented by this author (Khalaf 2020a, pp. 247-250, Appendix A; 2022a, pp. 13-14, endnote 69). Because these two concepts are being put into practice, it is technically possible to introduce them into the OG and to operationalize them in concert with integrity, as will be shown in the rest of this paper.

³⁰ <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/compatibility> Accessed 1 Oct 2022

3.3 *Alternative Conceptual and Operational Framework*

Integrity, notably the state of being whole and not divided (wholeness and intactness), is the key to adopting a holistic approach to cultural and natural heritage protection. It is more useful than authenticity for this purpose, especially if its definition is revised and operationalized in concert with continuity and compatibility. Speaking from a practical point of view, it is possible to abandon authenticity and adopt the dynamic triad of integrity-continuity-compatibility, which is presented here as an alternative conceptual and operational framework that bridges the culture/nature divide, enables a more holistic protection of heritage and supports its role in meeting global challenges and agendas.

The definition of integrity in the OG (UNESCO 2021, paragraph 88) should be revised and broadened beyond OUV and its attributes to include other values, attributes and culture-nature interlinkages (if any). Culture-nature interlinkages may also, in some cases, underpin the OUV of a property (an example is Pimachiowin Aki, mentioned earlier). All values, including OUV, should be identified by a wider scope of stakeholders and rights-holders, notably local communities and Indigenous Peoples to enhance their role in the implementation of the Convention in accordance with an existing strategic objective (5th C) (UNESCO 2021, paragraph 26.5). In revising the definition of integrity, honesty should be added because it can be important to certain types of heritage. For example, archaeological remains may retain integrity largely due, not to wholeness or intactness, but to the honesty of their display or “presentation” (UNESCO 1972, Articles 4, 5, 6) with a view to promoting an understanding of their significance based on the current state of knowledge. Honesty is also critical for an intervention, notably a reconstruction. A reconstruction may be whole and intact, but have poor integrity nonetheless if it misleads people into thinking that it is an original. A reconstructed building or district, therefore, may retain integrity largely due to the honesty of the work, i.e., it takes account of evidence from all available sources and is identifiable as such to prevent misleading and deceiving the public and future generations, as explained earlier in this paper. All available sources including communal memories and traditional knowledge associated with a destroyed property, such as a historic building or district, should be consulted to re-establish its integrity and the continuity of the attributes of OUV and other values. This is the practical reason why “documentation” is needed (UNESCO 2021, paragraph 86). If reconstruction is understood as a conservation treatment that re-establishes the integrity of heritage for benefit and continuity while maintaining honesty and introducing compatible changes, then assessing authenticity would be redundant.

The attributes listed under authenticity in the OG (UNESCO 2021, paragraph 82) should be explicitly linked to continuity and, when change is involved/proposed (interventions), compatibility – i.e., continuity and compatibility of (or with) form, design, materials, substance, use, function, etc. – and should be listed under integrity. The natural attributes/features that are already listed under integrity (UNESCO 2021, paragraphs 90-95) should also be explicitly linked to continuity, e.g., continuity of ecological processes, and, when change is involved/proposed such as a hydroelectric project, compatibility. As a result, all the attributes – tangible, intangible, cultural, and natural – would be brought together to *bridge the divide* and *unify the treatment of heritage*. Integrity, therefore, can be understood as the ability of a property to convey and sustain its significance through the continuity of the attributes of OUV and other values, which, it must be noted, may change over time. Indeed, the integrity of heritage embraces both continuity and change.

A Statement of Significance (SOS) that captures OUV and all the identified values of a property should become a requirement in keeping with the revised definition of integrity. Because identifying values can be difficult when many people are involved, the OG or a resource manual should propose negotiation strategies and dispute resolution practices to help reach consensus. The SOS, rather than SOUV (UNESCO 2021, paragraph 51), should be the key reference for the holistic protection and management of a property. The SOS should be included in future nominations for inscription on the WHL. The identification of the attributes of OUV and other values in the SOS would define the extent of integrity and, therefore, the boundaries of a nominated property. The property will have to meet at least one OUV criterion (UNESCO 2021, paragraph 77), the qualifying conditions of integrity – i.e., continuity and compatibility – as well as holistic protection and management requirements.

In this alternative conceptual and operational framework, continuity and compatibility are not only qualifying conditions of integrity, but also principles underpinning conservation, which is an integral part of management and an existing strategic objective (2nd C) that reads as follows: “Ensure the effective Conservation of World Heritage Properties” (UNESCO 2021, paragraph 26.2). Accordingly, a State Party that nominates a property for inscription on the WHL in the future will have to commit to ensuring the effective conservation of its integrity by managing continuity and change, including determining the compatibility of interventions. Here, too, community involvement should be sought (5th C) (UNESCO 2021, paragraph 26.5) because conserving the integrity of heritage is first and foremost carried out for the benefit of people.

It is important to clarify in the OG that integrity is dynamic because values, including OUV, attributes, people’s perceptions and needs, site conditions, and circumstances at the time of inscription of a property on the WHL can later change. For this reason, the SOS should be open to review and this review process may occur during periodic reporting, which is an existing mechanism for the implementation of the Convention (UNESCO 2021, paragraphs 199-210).

Once integrity is recognized as dynamic, States Parties can better contribute to SDGs (e.g., climate action), create potential benefits for people, and anticipate and plan for potential risks and losses, which may be inevitable (e.g., climate change impacts) (Khalaf 2022a). It would be helpful to deal with potential loss during periodic reporting to improve links with reactive monitoring and optimize the use of technical and financial resources (Khalaf 2022b). The Committee may later decide to include a property whose integrity is, or will be, compromised in the List of World Heritage in Danger to open access to enhanced technical and financial international assistance in accordance with the text of the Convention (UNESCO 1972, Article 11.4). Ultimately, the Committee may be faced with the reality of having to redefine the property’s OUV or delist it.³¹

4 Conclusion

To protect cultural and natural heritage of Outstanding Universal Value in a more holistic manner under the UNESCO World Heritage Convention, this paper proposed an alternative conceptual and operational framework. It entails abandoning authenticity, revising integrity and operationalizing it in concert with continuity and compatibility, which should be introduced into the OG. Authenticity should be abandoned not only because it reinforces the culture/nature divide,

³¹ As of 2021, the Committee has delisted three properties due to inappropriate, incompatible, interventions (resource extraction, infrastructure and development projects) that compromise the integrity and OUV of the properties. It has not yet done so due to impacts beyond the sole control of States Parties, such as climate change.

but also because: **1.** its assessment is impractical, inconsistent, and can be challenged over time, **2.** its ability to justify inclusion in the WHL is weak as shown in several SOUVs that rely instead on continuity, and **3.** its relevance to heritage protection and sustainable development is diminishing.

The proposed alternative conceptual and operational framework unifies the treatment of cultural and natural heritage; as a consequence, it can foster closer working arrangements between the two fields, and between ICOMOS and IUCN, i.e., connecting practice. Its illustration is a dynamic triad (**Figure 1**), which merges heritage protection with Outstanding Universal Value and its criteria, at the center, and is therefore closer to the text of the Convention than the current “three pillars” (UNESCO, ICCROM, ICOMOS and IUCN 2013, p. 35). It applies to natural and cultural properties, including reconstructed ones, and can be put into effect following a few revisions to the OG (**Figure 2**). These recommended revisions can potentially enhance policy coherence and consistency, and reinforce the conservation mandate of the Convention (2nd C), thereby strengthening the credibility of the system and the WHL (1st C) (UNESCO 2021, paragraph 26.1.2). If the World Heritage Committee decides to entertain this author’s recommendations and to amend the OG accordingly, the Convention’s innovative achievement of bringing together cultural and natural heritage of Outstanding Universal Value, under an effective system of collective protection organized on a permanent basis, can be better reflected in the future. The implementation of the Convention, which turned 50 in November 2022, can and should be imagined differently for the next 50.

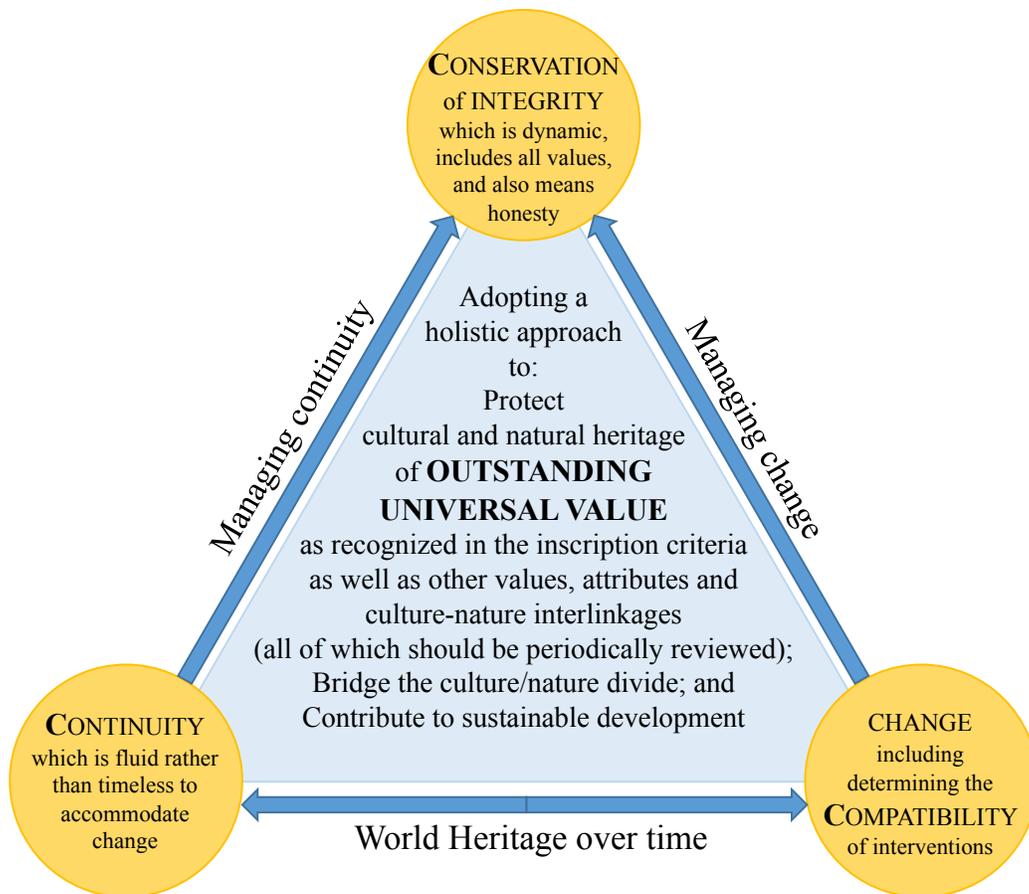


Figure 1: Alternative Conceptual and Operational Framework for the Future Implementation of the UNESCO World Heritage Convention (© Roha W. Khalaf 2023)

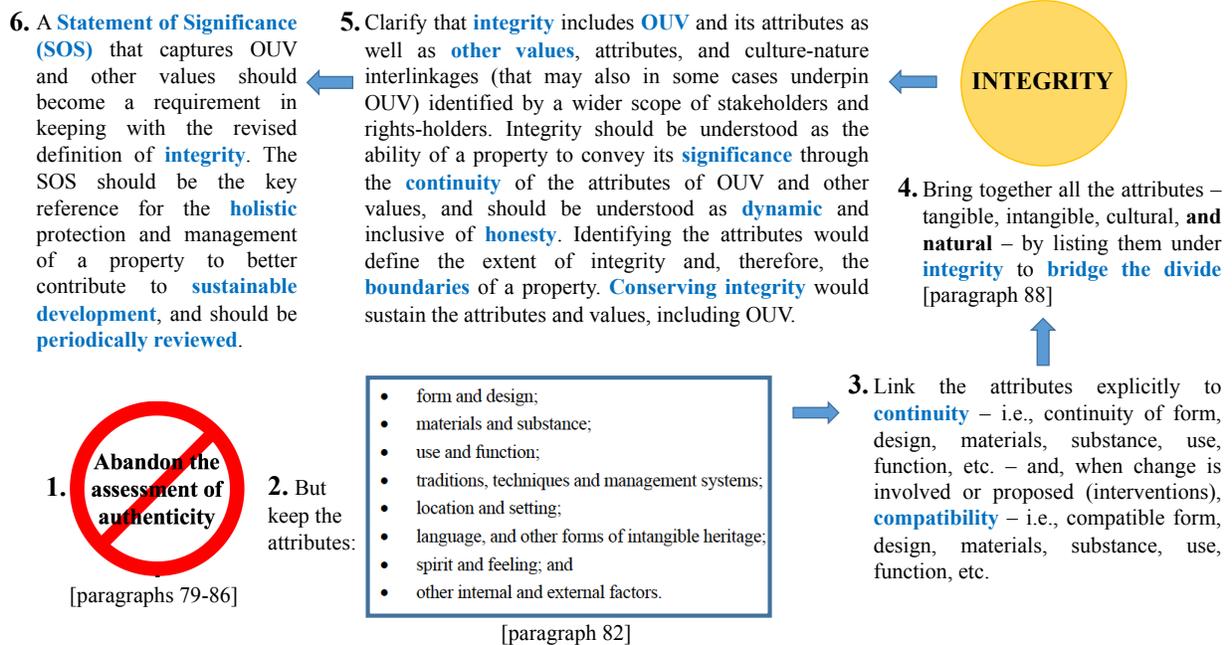


Figure 2: Recommended Revisions to the Operational Guidelines (© Roha W. Khalaf 2023)

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Roha W. Khalaf holds a Ph.D. in Aménagement (Environmental Design) from Université de Montréal (2013), a Master of Architecture, a Bachelor of Architectural Studies with a minor in French literature and a Certificate in Teaching Skills from Carleton University, Canada. Her experience includes architectural and urban design, cultural heritage conservation and policy-making. Her independent self-funded research gradually develops a practical policy proposal for the future implementation of the World Heritage Convention, addressing, among other issues, reconstruction, culture/nature divide, and sustainable development. Because of this gradual approach, her research is published as a series of articles in international peer-reviewed journals. **ORCID:** <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-5779-7079> Roha is a member of ICOMOS Canada. In 2022, ICOMOS Ireland invited her to deliver the ICOMOS Ireland Annual Maura Shaffrey Memorial Lecture to mark the 50th anniversary of the Convention. The lecture is entitled “The Future for the World Heritage Convention: Concepts, Challenges, and Changes” and is available to watch on the ICOMOS Ireland YouTube Channel: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QRIDJgDuMHQ&t=4423s>