

THE ICOMOS INTERNATIONAL CULTURAL TOURISM CHARTER: LINKING CULTURAL HERITAGE CONSERVATION TO THE CELEBRATION OF CULTURAL DIVERSITY

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Introduction

This Paper responds to the principal theme of the ICOMOS Scientific Symposium, Madrid 2002, *Strategies for the world's cultural heritage preservation in a globalised world: principles, practices, perspectives*.

It argues that the *ICOMOS International Cultural Tourism Charter* provides ICOMOS with an important basis for responding to the challenges of sustaining and expanding preservation or conservation in a globalised world. One of the great challenges facing ICOMOS in the 21st century is to balance the application of standard or universal conservation principles with the recognition, protection and promotion of cultural diversity within the myriad of individual communities that define the international conservation environment.

The Paper establishes a key part of the theme for Section 6 of the Scientific Symposium, *Public Awareness*. It demonstrates how the *ICOMOS International Cultural Tourism Charter* can provide a foundation for much of the wider work of ICOMOS, its International and National Committees, at this critical point in the debate over the benefits and threats of globalisation.

Globalisation, Friend or Foe?

Globalisation has both its supporters and detractors. Those who support it claim benefits from open markets, greater international flows of capital and expertise, and greater access to information and technology. They see globalisation as universal, unobjectionable and undeniable. Globalisation became a mantra during the last decade of the 20th century. Discussion in international circles revolved around the decline of "country" and "locality", and the rise of globalisation in most walks of life.

Its detractors focused on the overwhelming influence and market dominance of international organisations, the destruction of local economic capacity and the loss of individual community and cultural identity. It has been rightly blamed for the imposition of standardised, poorly designed, insensitive and often totally inappropriate financial and governance measures that have seen some societies reduced to poverty or severely constrained in their economic growth. Standing against the forces unleashed by globalisation is

the cultural diversity of individual countries and communities around the world.

Globalisation essentially refers to the closer integration of countries and people around the world, brought about by the enormous reduction in the cost of transportation and communications, the breaking down of barriers to the flow of goods and services, capital, knowledge and information across national borders. The rapid pace of change inherent in globalisation has made cultural adaptation difficult for individual communities, leading to social dislocation. At a time of increasing globalisation, the protection, conservation, interpretation and presentation of the heritage and cultural diversity of any particular place or region, is an important challenge for people everywhere.

In many ways cultural heritage conservation already operates in a globalised manner.

The conservation industry within international, national and regional sectors works in a relatively consistent way towards a commonly agreed objective. Modern communications, affordable travel, international conferences and shared information have generated a remarkably consistent approach to the conservation of cultural heritage across the world, over the last quarter century. ICOMOS, UNESCO, the World Heritage Convention and organisations such as the Getty, World Monument Fund and Ford Foundation, provide an international global architecture for conservation that is underwritten by a consistent methodology and philosophy, one that extends across most parts of the world.

The conservation, communication and celebration of the cultural heritage and cultural diversity of individual societies are therefore major responsibilities of the international conservation community. However, management of that heritage, within a framework of internationally recognised and appropriately applied standards, is usually the responsibility of the particular community or custodian group.

The cultural identity of individual communities, and its manifestation as tangible and intangible cultural heritage, is increasingly being seen as a major factor that can enable them to withstand and respond to the power of globalised market forces. Cultural identity enhances the capacity of

human beings, whether individually or in groups, to recognise and manage their environment. Culture positively enables individuals to establish, maintain and extend their social relations (social capital) just as much as their ability to manage their economic and physical environment.

Capitalising on their cultural distinctiveness presents individual communities throughout the world with a significant opportunity to reduce poverty and provide a sustainable future by drawing down some of the direct economic benefits from tourism expenditure. A key part of this process is the presentation and interpretation of their cultural heritage.

The Importance of Public Awareness

The ICOMOS and the *ICOMOS International Cultural Tourism Charter* have an important role to play in enhancing the ability of individual communities to identify and present their distinctive character to the outside world.

One of the major philosophies of the *Charter* is the importance of presenting the heritage significance of historic places. Unless there is public awareness and public support for cultural heritage places, the whole conservation process will be marginalised and will not gain the critical levels of funding or public and political support so necessary for its survival and so vital for the work of the conservation community.

A critical part of undertaking any protection, conservation or management of heritage places, the intangible heritage and collections is therefore to make their significance physically and/or intellectually accessible to the host community and to visitors.

Tourism and Cultural Heritage Conservation

Tourism can be categorised as both a globalised and localised force in the 21st century. It is one of the world's largest and most energetic, but most diverse industries. It is distinctive in its local attractions, but universal in its tourist audience.

Internationally, tourism is dominated by airline, shipping and tour companies, hotel chains, travel agencies, credit card providers, and the extraordinary information capability of the Internet. The disastrous effects on international visitor confidence arising from such dreadful events as the September 11 attacks in the US, civil wars in Nepal, the Balkans, southern Africa and Central Asia, the Israeli – Palestinian conflict and more recently the appalling bomb attacks in Bali, are clear examples of the volatility of tourism, and the risks that can arise from an over-reliance on revenue derived from tourism expenditure.

Locally, tourism comprises the vast array of hospitality, transportation, merchandise and service providers who respond to the demands of the visitor, both international and domestic. A large component of the visitor's motivation

in selecting any destination is to explore, understand, appreciate and enjoy the distinctive lifestyle, scenic attractions and cultural identity of the local community.

Cultural heritage, in all its many facets, both tangible and intangible, plays a large part in this identity. Those who administer, safeguard and conserve the cultural heritage and those who nourish its on-going development are key participants. Together, they hold the keys to a great majority of the world's tourism attractions.

A primary objective for managing heritage is to communicate its significance and need for its conservation to its host community and to visitors. Reasonable and well-managed physical, intellectual and/or emotive access to heritage and cultural development is both a right and a privilege. It brings with it a duty of respect for the heritage values, interests and equity of the present-day host community, indigenous custodians or owners of historic property and for the landscapes and cultures from which that heritage evolved.

The *ICOMOS International Cultural Tourism Charter* encourages the identification, communication and presentation of the cultural heritage to both visitors and the host communities that sustain the heritage. It stresses the concept that heritage is a universal characteristic of every living community, it is not confined to the "headline" sites such as World Heritage places or nationally listed cultural sites. Every visitor who travels to a place beyond where they live, experiences the everyday lives and living environments of another community. Heritage Tourism is not just about visiting so-called heritage sites or cultural attractions, it is about experiencing the entire cultural character of the destination.

The process of identification of the cultural assets within any community has moved a long way forward over recent years, driven by the UNESCO *Our Creative Diversity* program and a growing awareness of the inherent links between natural and cultural heritage, between tangible and intangible heritage and among indigenous, settler and long-term heritage values.

Heritage is a broad concept and encompasses the natural as well as the cultural environment. It encompasses landscapes, historic places, sites and built environments, as well as biodiversity, collections, past and continuing cultural practices, knowledge and living experiences. It records and expresses the long processes of historic development, forming the essence of diverse national, regional, indigenous and local identities and is an integral part of modern life. It is a dynamic social reference point and positive instrument for growth and change. The particular heritage and collective memory of each locality or community is irreplaceable and an important foundation for development, both now and into the future.

Indigenous Cultural Heritage is dynamic. It includes both Tangible and Intangible expressions of culture that link

generations of Indigenous people over time. Indigenous people often express their cultural heritage through “the person”, their relationships with country, people, beliefs, knowledge, law, language, symbols, ways of living, sea, land and objects all of which arise from Indigenous spirituality. Indigenous Cultural Heritage is essentially defined and expressed by the Traditional Custodians of that heritage.

Intangible Cultural Heritage can be defined as embracing all forms of traditional and popular or folk culture, the collective works originating in a given community and based on tradition. These creations are transmitted orally or by gesture, and are modified over a period of time, through a process of collective re-creation. They include oral traditions, customs, languages, music, dance, rituals, festivals, traditional medicine and pharmacopeia, popular sports, food and the culinary arts and all kinds of special skill connected with the material aspects of culture, such as tools and the habitat.

Tangible Cultural Heritage encompasses the vast created works of humankind, including places of human habitation, villages, towns and cities, buildings, structures, art works, documents, handicrafts, musical instruments, furniture, clothing and items of personal decoration, religious, ritual and funerary objects, tools, machinery and equipment, and industrial systems.

Well managed access to the cultural heritage is a basic human right, but one that places a deep obligation on the visitor to respect and sustain that heritage. Some societies and traditional owners prefer to restrict the access that visitors have to their religious and ceremonial practices, and the visitor must respect those wishes. The *Charter* seeks to

build firm and productive relationships between conservationists and the tourism industry. It is aimed directly at those who are concerned about the protection and sustenance of the cultural identity of host and/or indigenous communities and those who seek to make that diversity accessible to the visitor. Both parties are critically interested in the long-term sustainability of the world’s heritage and tourism resources.

The *ICOMOS International Cultural Tourism Charter* is therefore a critical link between cultural heritage conservation and the celebration of cultural diversity. It provides a key mechanism for ICOMOS, as an international organisation, to respond to the demands and opportunities of individual communities as they face the challenges and threats of globalisation.

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