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WHC-96/CONF.202/4
Paris, 30 April 1996
Original: English/French

UNITED NATIONS EDUCATIONAL,
SCIENTIFIC AND CULTURAL ORGANIZATION

CONVENTION CONCERNING THE PROTECTION OF THE
WORLD CULTURAL AND NATURAL HERITAGE

BUREAU OF THE WORLD HERITAGE COMMITTEE

Twentieth session
UNESCO Headquarters, Paris, Room X (Fontenoy)

24 - 29 June 1996

Item 6 of the Provisional Agenda: Progress Report on Thematic and Comparative Studies

SUMMARY

In accordance with the decisions of the World Heritage Committee at its nineteenth session, this item was included on the agenda to provide a progress report on thematic and comparative studies. The working document contains summary reports on two thematic studies (Sections A.1 and A.2) and on comparative studies (Section B) as well as specific recommendations made by the experts. The full reports are contained in information documents WHC-96/CONF.202/INF.6, WHC-96/CONF.202/INF.9 and WHC-96/CONF.202/INF.10.

The Bureau is requested to examine the attached document and review the specific recommendations for changes to the Operational Guidelines (boxes) in Section A.1 as well as general recommendations (bold) in Section A.1.

A. Thematic Studies

A. 1 Report of the Expert Meeting on Evaluation of General Principles and Criteria for Nominations of Natural World Heritage sites (Parc national de la Vanoise, France, 22 to 24 March 1996)

The expert meeting on "Evaluation of general principles and criteria for nominations of natural World Heritage sites" was held from 22 to 24 March 1996 at the Parc National de la Vanoise (France) at the kind invitation of the French Ministry for the Environment. Twenty experts representing natural and cultural heritage disciplines participated in their individual capacity. The full report of the meeting is contained in information document WHC-96/CONF.202/INF.9 in English and French.

The expert group reviewed the natural heritage concepts, the coverage of natural sites on the World Heritage List as well as its balance, manageability and credibility.

The expert group emphasized the unifying concept of World Heritage embracing both cultural and natural heritage as outlined in the text of the Convention and the need for an overarching Global Strategy for both natural and cultural heritage. As a result of the discussions, the experts recommended the following changes to the Operational Guidelines (in boxes):

Add to Paragraph 6 (i) of the Operational Guidelines the following (changes in bold):

(i) The Convention provides for the protection of those cultural and natural properties (1) deemed to be of outstanding universal value. It is not intended to provide for the protection of all properties of great interest, importance or value. **Inscription on the World Heritage List is reserved for only a selection of the most outstanding properties from the international point of view. In accordance with Article 12 of the Convention, States Parties should not assume that a site of national and/or regional importance will automatically be included in the World Heritage List.** The outstanding universal value of cultural and natural properties is defined by Articles 1 and 2 of the Convention. These definitions are interpreted by the Committee by using two sets of criteria: one set for cultural property and another set for natural property. The criteria and the conditions of authenticity or integrity adopted by the Committee for this purpose are set out in paragraphs 24 and 44 below.

The experts, furthermore, recommended:

For all purposes of standard setting, credibility, manageability and commensurability with available resources, inscription in the World Heritage List should be kept to a strict minimum. A review of the properties already in the World Heritage List should be carried out with a view to re-assessing the World Heritage criteria in force. States Parties should be consulted about any suggested changes which may result from such an exercise. Priority should be given to properties not yet represented in the World Heritage List.

The expert group recommended to amend Paragraph 7 of the Operational Guidelines as follows (changes in **bold**, deletions ~~crossed-out~~):

The Committee requests each State Party to submit to it a tentative list of properties which it intends to nominate for inscription to the World Heritage List during the following five to ten years. This tentative list will constitute the "inventory" (provided for in Article 11 of the Convention) of the cultural and natural properties situated within the territory of each State Party and which it considers suitable for inclusion in the World Heritage List. The purpose of these tentative lists is to enable the Committee to evaluate within the widest possible context the "outstanding universal value" of each property nominated to the List. The Committee hopes that States Parties that have not yet submitted a tentative list will do so as early as possible. States Parties are reminded of the Committee's earlier decision not to consider ~~cultural~~ nominations unless the nomination is contained in such a list of properties.

The expert group recommended to amend Paragraph 44 (iii) of the Operational Guidelines as follows (changes in **bold**):

(iii) contain superlative natural phenomena or areas of exceptional natural beauty and aesthetic importance (**the Committee considers that this criterion should justify inclusion in the List only in exceptional circumstances or in conjunction with other natural or cultural criteria**); or

Add to Paragraph 61 (c) of the Operational Guidelines the following (changes in **bold**):

(c) **A comparative evaluation of similar properties is an essential part of the process of evaluation. ICOMOS and IUCN are therefore requested to make such comparative evaluations of properties belonging to the same type of property;**

Furthermore, the experts made the following recommendations:

To review the World Heritage List on the occasion of the 25th anniversary of the Convention, in order to take into account the new and revised criteria and to give an accurate reflection of the diversity of the heritage of humankind. The outcome of such a review would also help to

address shortcomings and imbalances of the World Heritage List.

The expert group recognized that, while some previous decisions may now be seen not to comply with the rigour in evaluation called for by the provisions of the Operational Guidelines, such decisions should not be taken as a precedent for a less strict application of the criteria in the evaluation at present or in the future. The critical issue is maintaining the credibility of, and respect for, the World Heritage List.

The experts proposed to examine the possibility of one single set of criteria:

The expert group recommended that the Committee consider developing one set of criteria, incorporating existing natural and cultural heritage criteria and promoting a unified identity for all World Heritage sites as the outstanding heritage of humankind.

While reviewing the notion of integrity,

the experts recommended that the Committee consider the preparation of a study concerning the possibility of applying conditions of integrity to both natural and cultural heritage, and thus of applying one common approach for the identification and evaluation of World Heritage.

The experts also considered

that there are numerous inconsistencies in the Operational Guidelines and welcomed the decision by the nineteenth session of the World Heritage Committee to prepare a Glossary of World Heritage Terms extracting definitions and explanatory notes from the Operational Guidelines. A number of revisions suggested by the experts are indicated in the relevant chapters of this report and may be taken into consideration.

The expert group recommended to include the following definition in the Glossary:

A natural area is one where bio-physical processes and landform features are still relatively intact and where a primary management goal of the area is to ensure that natural values are protected. The term "natural" is a relative one. It is recognized that no area is totally

pristine and that all natural areas are in a dynamic state. Human activities in natural areas often occur and when sustainable may complement the natural values of the area.

A.2 Regional Thematic Study Meeting: European Cultural Landscapes of Outstanding Universal Value (Vienna, Austria, 21 April 1996)

Following the Action Plan for Cultural Landscapes as adopted by the seventeenth session of the World Heritage Committee held in Cartagena in December 1993, a series of regional thematic study meetings were organized in 1994 and 1995. In 1996 a regional thematic study meeting on European Cultural Landscapes of Outstanding Universal Value was organized by the UNESCO World Heritage Centre, the advisory bodies and the Austrian National Commission for UNESCO in cooperation with Austria Nostra in Vienna (Austria) on 21 April 1996.

The report of the meeting can be found as information document WHC-96/CONF.202/INF.10 and the Bureau is asked to take note of the results of this regional thematic study.

B. Comparative studies on cultural properties

The idea to compare the importance of cultural properties from the scientific, historical and cultural viewpoints, amongst other considerations, in order to identify the most representative examples for inscription on the List, is at the heart of the 1972 Convention and its fundamental concept of "outstanding universal value" contained in its preamble. If properties eligible for inscription on the List must be of "outstanding universal value", they consequently must be selected by taking into account other properties which, albeit warranting the highest interest and worthy of recognition and protection, cannot be considered as unique and irreplaceable amongst the heritage of humankind.

That is why the notion of a comparative study is referred to several times in the Guidelines, and is an integral part of the inscription process, starting with the establishment of the tentative list right through to the nomination file.

Paragraphs 1 and 6(i) of the Guidelines reiterate the principle of choice which has to be made between properties. Paragraphs 7 and 8 introduce the notion of comparison when establishing tentative lists, Paragraphs 12 and 59 clearly stipulate that a comparative

evaluation of the proposed property should be included in the nomination file, whilst Paragraph 61 (c) requests ICOMOS to make comparative evaluations of properties belonging to the same type during the evaluation process.

Having laid down these principles, the question as to how a comparative evaluation could and should be carried out has been raised. Without too much difficulty one can imagine that comparisons based on the state of conservation, the relative historical importance, richness, representative character and other criteria can be established, for the aims of the Convention, between cultural properties which are considered fairly simple and easily identifiable - if one keeps to a somewhat general level. However, what is the situation with far more complex properties which can only be understood and appreciated through their multiple cultural, social, economic, technical and historical aspects and dimensions, among others -- as, for example, the establishment of human complexes, although these are commonly grouped together under the convenient but simplistic term of "historical cities"?

A discussion on this question was initiated during the nineteenth session of the World Heritage Bureau, in July 1995, then taken up again during the nineteenth session of the Committee, held in Berlin last December. In view of the different points of view which were expressed, and especially the complexity of the subject and its epistemological and methodological assumptions, the Committee requested ICOMOS to submit a paper on these questions to the twentieth session of the Bureau. Document WHC-96/CONF.202/INF.6 will be presented to the Bureau for examination and will be introduced by the representatives of this advisory body to the Convention.