UNITED NATIONS EDUCATIONAL, SCIENTIFIC AND CULTURAL ORGANIZATION

CONVENTION CONCERNING THE PROTECTION OF THE WORLD CULTURAL AND NATURAL HERITAGE

WORLD HERITAGE COMMITTEE
Twenty-fifth session
Helsinki, Finland
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__Item 12 of the Provisional Agenda__: Progress Report on the Information Management Strategy

SUMMARY

At its twenty-fourth session (Cairns, Australia), the World Heritage Committee requested the World Heritage Centre to work with interested delegations in the elaboration of an Information Management Strategy.

This document describes such a strategy now presented in the form of an overall World Heritage Information Management Programme for the coming five years. The suggested Programme has been presented to interested delegations and the Advisory Bodies.

A successful World Heritage Information Management Strategy must involve all States Parties, Advisory Bodies and other partners. In order to become a useful and powerful tool, it must have wide participation and close co-ordination. The World Heritage Information Management Programme has the potential to create significant savings in efficiency as well as improvement of the effectiveness of the Convention.

The World Heritage Information Management Programme is based on the following principles: (1) an incremental approach; (2) partnerships; (3) strengthening the capacity of the less developed States Parties to handle their own data and information; (4) coordinating and including in the proposed five-year Programme, the Periodic Reporting Exercise and the inclusion of geo-referenced data; (5) avoidance of duplication by working in partnership with organizations/institutions already involved in conservation/presentation/preservation activities.

Decision required: The Committee is requested to approve the budget (see annex 1) and to endorse the proposed World Heritage Information Management Programme as well as to encourage interested States Parties to join this initiative to be coordinated by the World Heritage Centre.

World Heritage Information Management Programme

<u>Background</u>

The World Heritage Convention will celebrate its 30th anniversary in November 2002. Since the inscription of the first site in 1978, to the present date, 690 sites have been inscribed on the World Heritage List, and an additional large number has been proposed for nomination this year. The data and information associated with each of these sites covers a wide range of issues: the nomination file as originally presented by the State Party; evaluation reports from the Advisory Bodies, associated reactive monitoring: reports on the state of conservation of the site, mission reports to the site, recommendations, actions taken, technical assistance provided, etc.

The World Heritage Centre was created in 1992 to concentrate in one administrative and technical unit, the Secretariat for the Convention. One of the main tasks of the World Heritage Centre is to maintain and update all the data and information relevant to the Convention: the sites inscribed and nominated; reports on the state of conservation of sites; documents of the various statutory meetings; decisions taken at these statutory meetings; reports from the Advisory Bodies or others. A large amount of data and information required for the day-to-day operations of the World Heritage Centre in servicing the States Parties needs to be managed. The information is also vital for the Advisory Bodies, the World Heritage Committee and the States Parties, and an increasing number of partners in World Heritage conservation.

At the twenty-fourth session of the World Heritage Committee, the Committee invited the Centre to elaborate an overall Information Management Strategy.

The World Heritage Centre presents herein not only the strategy as requested, but a wider and a long-term vision of a World Heritage Information Management Programme.

<u>Progress to date</u>

Since 1998, at the request of the Committee, the World Heritage Centre began analyzing the implementation of an overall information management system. Experts groups visited the World Heritage Centre with the aim of identifying the needs and suggesting activities for the future. A significant effort has been made by the World Heritage Centre in order to put information into electronic support and make it available for dissemination.

A World Heritage Centre web site became operational at its URL address: www.unesco.org/whc. The site offers a large variety of World Heritage standard documents including the text of the Convention, the List of inscribed sites, forms for nomination, international assistance; documents for and reports of recent meetings of the Bureau and the Committee, calendar of events and various public information documents. The World Heritage Centre has striven to ensure that all information is available in English and French.

The lack of sufficient human resources dedicated to these tasks makes it difficult to update and maintain the current system as frequently as is required. Currently, the World Heritage Centre web-site

makes available a large amount of data. However, a mechanism to easily access this data is lacking. The proposed World Heritage Information Management Programme builds the bridge between all existing data and the required information for decision-makers to be able to find and digest this enormous amount of data. The objective of this Programme is to become the core for World Heritage data and information acquisition and dissemination.

The overall implementation of this strategy requires wide participation and close coordination of the Advisory Bodies, the World Heritage Centre and the States Parties.

A World Heritage Information Management Programme

Proposed activities

The proposed activities listed below indicate the overall philosophy as well as the incremental approach suggested by indicating the next steps to be taken in the implementation of this Information Management Programme.

The objective is that the World Heritage Information Management Programme becomes the central core for World Heritage data and information acquisition, management and dissemination. States Parties, the Advisory Bodies, UNESCO and NGOs are invited to participate in these activities. The Programme takes into consideration the needs of all States Parties, and in particular those having the greatest need for data and information.

An integrated World Heritage Centre information management system

Currently, the World Heritage Centre deals with a wide variety of tasks linked to identification and protectionof WH sites, as defined in the text of the Convention: nominations-registration, reactive monitoring of sites, periodic reporting, States Party information, financial and administrative processes, preparation of statutory meetings and associated documentation, etc. Information systems exist on each one of these activities but they are not integrated into an overall system. The proposed WH Information Management Programme recognizes the need to build a simple integrated information system that can be managed, updated and maintained internally. An overall architecture is proposed so that the associated databases can be created. Depending on the availability of funds, such a computer system will be developed with an incremental approach, as approved by the twenty-fourth session of the Committee.

In the future, reports extracted automatically from these databases shall be used to continuously feed the World Heritage web site. Such a system will enable the World Heritage Centre to have easy access not only to the information managed by a single unit, but to all relevant data generated within the Centre and its partners. The system will also facilitate the creation of reports required for the statutory meetings.

The most important advantage of having such a system in place and operational will be a significantly improved method for responding to incoming queries from the States Parties. The strategy foresees, in the long-term, the inclusion of digital cartography relating to World Heritage sites.

A World Heritage web site that services all State Parties

The long-term vision is to make extensive use of the Internet for the management of World Heritage information and its associated dissemination. The World Heritage Information Management Programme takes into consideration the current barriers to full Internet use by all States Parties. These are in summary:

1. The wide variety of telecommunication infrastructures – availability, reliability, speed of transmission and quality of connection.
2. The range of computer equipment in use, if any, and their associated availability in the World Heritage sites and/or related offices.
3. The associated cost of Internet access.

While the main strategy is focused on making the World Heritage web site the primary resource for information and data dissemination, such a strategy must facilitate the extraction of data from the web site for its transmission by mail or electronic media to provide information to those States Parties without access to the Internet.

On a regular basis, 'mirror copies' of the World Heritage web site will be made available on CD to provide support to those States Parties with the facilities to manage data and information in electronic format. The World Heritage Centre also intends to continue providing information in printed form or via e-mail, to ensure that no State Party is excluded from access to World Heritage information.

The main objective of making the World Heritage web site the primary resource of information is to provide a central platform where all information will reside in an agreed common format and standard. Once such a platform is created, it will be easier for the main actors of the Convention to exchange information, consult, extract and disseminate such data and information to all States Parties.

The World Heritage Information Management Programme strongly encourages States Parties possessing the know-how of Internet technology, to work in close partnership with the World Heritage Centre, creating under the same standards, associated web pages. The ultimate goal is that each State Party maintains and updates its associated web pages. The less developed States Parties will be assisted by partner institutions which, upon request, will create and maintain their web pages, using the information provided by those States Parties owners of such information.

A continuously evolving World Heritage web site

Since 1996, when the World Heritage web site was initiated, Internet has evolved significantly. New techniques are now available that greatly simplify the presentation of information and its access. The World Heritage Information Management Programme will continuously make use of the latest technologies to facilitate the presentation and search of information. The Programme takes into consideration the needs of States Parties with limited access to the Internet, and the design of the World Heritage web site will allow users to choose the appropriate level of sophistication adapted to their

situation. States Parties with high-speed connections to the Internet will be able to use all images, graphics, colours, icons and multimedia including video. States Parties having reduced access to Internet will be able to see the associated text, colours and simple graphics.

Partnerships in order to integrate existing efforts

The World Heritage Information Management Programme needs to assist States Parties and the Advisory Bodies in distributing information that they possess, as well as the information held at the World Heritage Centre. The Programme should become the platform to assist States Parties and ICOMOS, ICCROM and IUCN with information dissemination. Whenever possible, additional partnerships will be established. Working closely with partners already collecting information on natural and cultural sites will significantly improve the periodic reporting exercise with the advantage that current efforts will be integrated instead of being duplicated.

The World Heritage Information Management Strategy will not duplicate any existing efforts; additional identified data and information will be integrated through the establishment of partnerships with institutions and organizations already managing information on World Heritage. The proposed programme does not pretend to centralize all data and information, but should be seen as a 'catalogue of sources of World Heritage data and information', where the data and information remains resident with the experts that have created it. Through partnerships, these institutions will be encouraged to participate in the dissemination of this information.

Free access to costly technology: As an example of current partnerships under negotiation, UNESCO and the World Heritage Centre have successfully obtained a world wide approval from the Space Agencies to provide access to satellite images and expertise for the monitoring of World Heritage sites. Through this partnership, States Parties of the World Heritage Convention may have, upon request, free access to a selected number and coverage of satellite images. The less developed States Parties may have, upon request, access to experts having the know-how in managing and processing these satellite images for applications in conservation and change-detection in World Heritage sites. In this way, satellite images and the associated technology will become a component of the proposed World Heritage Information Management Programme.

Strengthening States Parties' capacity

The World Heritage Information Management Programme takes into consideration the fact that not all States Parties currently possess information systems to support their World Heritage conservation and management activities. Data and information are the basic tools for a proper management plan and may assist in the decision-making processes.

The long-term objective of the strategy is to create the necessary capacity at the States Party level to be able to manage all their associated site data and information as a tool to facilitate their management and conservation efforts. Once a State Party starts managing its own data related to its cultural and natural sites, the exchange of information and experiences with other States Parties can take place. Regional exchanges will be encouraged.

The strengthening of national World Heritage information systems will bring together at the national level, tasks related to the establishment of a tentative list, periodic reporting and the Global Strategy. Based on this, the proposed World Heritage Information Management Programme will bring coherence to a series of tasks currently under implementation by the Convention. Depending upon the availability of funds, capacity-building workshops in the field of cultural and natural site-related data and information management, shall be organized. Whenever possible, taking advantage of the different World Heritage workshops and meetings, and as appropriate, back-to-back events on information management will also be organized.

Sharing experiences: the Information Management Programme seeks, in the long term to display toolkits on the World Heritage web site. Guidelines on the conservation of natural and cultural sites, guidelines to develop and implement a management plan for a site, guidelines for the preparation of periodic reporting, templates on legislation, examples of sites working efficiently (success stories), etc., will be included. States Parties are encouraged to make use of the Information Management Programme in order to exchange experiences and lessons learnt.

States Parties from a region will be encouraged to exchange regional information. The creation of dedicated web pages for the regional exchange of information is suggested. Whenever possible, partnerships will be established with regional institutions that are already installed in the region/sub-region and that have the expertise to disseminate information.

States Parties that already have relevant materials are also encouraged to work with the World Heritage Centre in the development of all these sections for the World Heritage Information Management Programme.

Increasing the audience of users

To date, most of the information managed by the World Heritage Convention has been targeted at experts in all aspects of the Convention. The World Heritage Information Management Programme foresees an extension to cover new audiences. With the success of Internet, a wide audience of users is searching information on the Web. Easy-to–read sections with illustrative images on the main goals of the World Heritage Convention, emphasizing the objectives of conservation and preservation, will be developed and made available. The World Heritage web site will be used to improve awareness of the Convention and its associated objectives. Information specially tailored for decision-makers, journalists, researchers, teachers, students, NGOs, school children and the general public will be included. Videos and electronic slide-shows describing main topics of the Convention will be available.

States Parties that have already developed some of the material mentioned herein are encouraged to work jointly with the World Heritage Centre in the incorporation of the existing material into the proposed World Heritage Information Management Programme.

In summary

An incremental approach is suggested to develop and implement an overall World Heritage Information Management Programme. In order to become a useful and powerful tool, the suggested strategy must have wide participation and close co-ordination. A successful World Heritage Information Management Programme must involve all States Parties, the Advisory Bodies and partners of the Convention. The World Heritage Information Management Programme, if implemented in close cooperation will all States Parties, will create significant savings in efficiency and improve the effectiveness and recognition of the Convention.

Securing the necessary funding

In order for the Information Management Programme to become a reality, the securing of the necessary financial resources remains a challenge. Adequate funds to implement, not only the activities described herein, but also future improvements and a continuous and on-going maintenance, are needed. The World Heritage Centre acknowledges the generous support provided by some States Parties during the period 1999 – 2000. However, in order to become a reality, an Information Management Programme requires a stable source of minimum funding. Annex I presents the minimum budget required. The World Heritage Centre has carefully elaborated this budget, taking into consideration various scenarios

Decisions required:

The Committee may wish to adopt the following decision:

> "The Committee notes the progress made by the World Heritage Centre in the development of a strategy to be presented at the 26th session of the Committee. This strategy is now finalized and it is included in the form of a complete and overall World Heritage Information Management Programme which will significantly benefit the World Heritage Convention.
>
> The Committee therefore endorses the creation of a World Heritage Information Management Programme and recommends the adoption of such a programme under the coordination of the World Heritage Centre.
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> The Committee encourages all State Parties interested in collaborating with the World Heritage Information Management Programme to contact the World Heritage Centre and to work in partnership with the World Heritage Centre.
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> The Committee requests the World Heritage Centre to create a task force, which includes a small number of States Parties and Advisory Bodies in order to advise on the implementation of the World Heritage Information Management Programme.
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> The Committee also requests the World Heritage Centre to inform on progress achieved in the implementation of this activity to future sessions of the Committee, under the title 'Progress in the implementation of the World Heritage Information Management Programme'".

Annex 1 (yearly budget)

Item and description	Requested from the WH Fund	In kind contribution from UNESCO	Target to obtain extra budgetary funds (fund raising)	Comments
Overall coordination of the programme, elaboration of project proposal for fund raising, establishment of partnerships, coordination with UNESCO DIT strategies, technical assistance advisory services, etc.	USD 60,000 IMS budget line Chapter I		USD 10,000	**Temporary solution**
Overall coordination of hardware and software maintenance services, assistance in the design of a new web-site, participation to the definition and implementation of a geo-referenced strategy and associated activities (sites boundaries).	USD 40,000 IMS budget line Chapter I		USD 10,000	**Temporary solution**
World Heritage web site design, development and maintenance.			USD 80,000	
Yearly maintenance of WHC network facilities, back-ups, etc.		USD 20,000		
1 International workshop per year on the topic of "sharing existing world heritage information", inviting selected World Heritage State Parties, Advisory Bodies, etc.	USD 30,000 Technical assistance Chapter III			
1 Sub-contract to convert into Internet-electronic form guidelines about the implementation of the Convention, Management Plan(s), etc.			USD 30,000	
1 International /meeting per year inviting selected World Heritage State Parties and Advisory Bodies with the purpose to coordinate the sharing of information (Internet, etc.)	USD 30,000 Technical assistance Chapter III			

Item and description	Requested from the WH Fund	In kind contribution from UNESCO	Target to obtain extra budgetary funds (fund raising)	Comments
2 regional "National World Heritage Information Management" workshops per year inviting selected State Parties with the assistance of Advisory Bodies, Partners, etc.	USD 60,000	Technical assistance Chapter III		
1 Sub-contract to develop guidelines on national World Heritage Information Management for State Parties			USD 20,000	
TOTALS	USD 220,000	USD 30,000	USD 150,000	