

Multidisciplinary Workshop on the Strategic Framework for the Conservation and Management of the Mt Athos Cultural and Natural Heritage

Rationale

The World Heritage Committee urged during its 36th Session the State Party (Hellenic Republic) to organize a multidisciplinary workshop of key stakeholders to shape the integrated approach to the conservation and management of Mount Athos (Decision **36COM7B.38**).

The establishment of a platform for dialogue and mutual understanding among the stakeholders involved in the preservation of heritage of religious interest was considered as significant by UNESCO; therefore, the first major international meeting on the role of the religious communities in the management of World Heritage properties was organized successfully under the patronage of UNESCO in 2010 in Kiev (Ukraine).

Properties of religious or spiritual interest (living religious sites) constitute a significant part of the Hellenic World Heritage List. Specific spiritual meanings are mentioned to justify the Outstanding Universal Value (OUV) of these properties. Among them Mount Athos is the most outstanding example, since it concerns a large and thriving monastic community with a millenary uninterrupted tradition.

Covering an area of just over 33,000 hectares and mostly cloaked by dense Mediterranean forests, the property includes the entire narrow rocky strip of the easternmost of the three peninsulas of Chalcidice, which jut into the Aegean Sea in northern Greece. The steep slopes of Mount Athos are punctuated by twenty imposing monasteries and their subsidiary establishments. The architecture of the monasteries (which are presently inhabited by some 1700 monks) had a far-reaching impact and its school of painting influenced the history of Orthodox art. Moreover this thousand-year old site, where the sense of history is palpable everywhere - in the countryside, the monuments and the precious collections gathered slowly over time - retains even today its universal and exceptional significance.

An Orthodox spiritual centre since the 10th century, Mount Athos has enjoyed a self-administered status from the Byzantine era until the present day. Although the sovereignty of the Hellenic State remains intact, the management of Mount Athos is exercised by the representatives of the twenty Holy Monasteries, who constitute the Holy Community, while the responsibility for the protection and conservation of the natural and cultural property lies with the Ministry of Culture and Sports, the Centre for the Preservation of the Athonite Heritage, the Ministry of Environment, Energy and Climate Change, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

The preservation of the natural beauty and the artistic and monumental wealth within a living monastic community constitutes a real challenge for all the involved parties. Ensuring the effective protection and management of Mount Athos and guaranteeing its transmission to the future generations is a major responsibility for both the Hellenic State and the Holy Community.

The State Party has to guarantee the maintenance of the Outstanding Universal Value of this property, while the religious practices and associated rituals of the monastic community continue to take place unhindered. Thus, the management of Mount Athos should aim not only towards the maintenance of its Outstanding Universal Value, but also towards the maintenance of its spiritual values, which are of primary importance to the Holy Community and to the Orthodox faith in general.

Taking into account the above-mentioned complex character of the property, it is necessary to establish a close coordination and collaboration among all stakeholders, in order to achieve the best possible protection, conservation and management of the property. This multidisciplinary workshop seeks to strengthen the dialogue between them, so as firstly, to promote understanding and increase awareness on issues related to World Heritage values and secondly, to provide information about the specific character of a living religious community.

Goal

Better management of the property through the elaboration of a Management Framework, which will take into account the complex character of Mount Athos (administration, religious character, cultural and natural values etc.)

Objectives

- To provide participants with key knowledge on the World Heritage Convention and specifically the measures and instruments for protection, conservation, presentation, rehabilitation and management of the World Heritage properties, which should ensure that the Outstanding Universal Value of the World Heritage properties, including the conditions of integrity and/or authenticity at the time of inscription, are sustained or enhanced over time.
- To discuss World Heritage management requirements and their implications at site level including monitoring and state of conservation reporting when required.
- To inform participants about the conclusions of the Kiev International Seminar on the role of the religious communities in the management of World Heritage properties, the ICCROM 2003 Forum on Living Religious Heritage, the ICOMOS Resolution on Religious Heritage, as well as other related initiatives.

- To provide participants with key knowledge on the national legislation concerning the protection, conservation and administrative provisions for the preservation of cultural and natural heritage; to provide knowledge on the practical application of national policies.
- To discuss policies and programmes related to the conservation of the property.
- To discuss the development of appropriate mechanisms.
- To further promote relations between the Holy Community and the national authorities.

Proposed Communications/Lectures

1. Concept of Outstanding Universal Value, including the conditions of integrity and/or authenticity expressed through a variety of attributes and indicators of character, sense/spirit of place and its relationship to the World Heritage properties
2. Managing World Heritage properties to sustain or enhance Outstanding Universal Value
3. Cultural values represented by the World Heritage properties themselves, as well as of the role such monuments and sites play in contemporary society
4. Importance of Mount Athos and types of activities taking place
5. Presentation of existing national legislation
6. Presentation of the Preliminary Report on the Strategic Framework for Conservation and Management of the cultural and natural heritage of Mount Athos
7. Presentation of the restoration work at Mount Athos
8. Future projects at Mount Athos (National Strategic Reference Framework)
9. Presentation of the requirements for the sustainable use of the natural environment

Topics for further discussion

- What should the Technical Specifications of the Management Framework include taking into account the spiritual character of Mount Athos?
- What future actions should be undertaken in order to establish and implement the Technical specifications of the Management Framework for Mount Athos?

Methodology

The workshop will include communications and lectures by representatives of UNESCO and its Advisory Bodies, of national authorities and the Holy Community on the above-mentioned themes and an interactive session (debates) among the participants.

Expected Outputs

1. Framework for the development of an integrated management plan identifying its key components, its technical, administrative and financial requirements, including issues of coordination and monitoring;
2. Outline of a plan for future activities including a provisional timetable.

Organizer

Ministry of Culture and Sports in cooperation with:

- Mount Athos Holy Community
- UNESCO World Heritage Center
- World Heritage Center Advisory Bodies

Involved Parties

Other Ministries (Ministry of Environment, Energy and Climate Change, Ministry of Foreign Affairs)

Centre for the Preservation of the Athonite Heritage (KEDAK)

Hellenic National Committee for UNESCO

Duration

Two-day meeting **29.08.2013 - 30.08.2013**

Venue

Museum of Byzantine Culture, Thessaloniki