
Khangchendzonga (India) No 1513

Official name as proposed by the State Party

Khangchendzonga National Park

Location

State of Sikkim
Districts of West and North Sikkim

Brief description

Located in the Himalayan range in northern India, Khangchendzonga National Park (KNP) is a mountainous area including several peaks exceeding 6000m and 7000m in height and Mt Khangchendzonga, reaching 8586m a.s.l. The homonymous Massif determines the physiography of Sikkim. The rapid change in height of the nominated area (from 1220m to 8586m a.s.l. in just 40km, as the crow flies) has a strong influence on the climate, the precipitation regimes, and the variety of the flora and fauna of the region. Mount Khangchendzonga and many natural features within the nominated property are endowed with cultural meanings and sacred significance and represent the centre of Sikkim's indigenous peoples' cosmogonies. These were later integrated into Buddhist belief and altogether constitute the base for Sikkimese identity and unity.

Category of property

In terms of categories of cultural property set out in Article I of the 1972 World Heritage Convention, this is a *site*.

In terms of the *Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention* (July 2015) paragraph 47, it is also a *cultural landscape*.

[Note: The property is nominated as a mixed cultural and natural site. IUCN will assess the natural significances, while ICOMOS assesses the cultural significances.]

1 Basic data

Included in the Tentative List

15 March 2006

International Assistance from the World Heritage Fund for preparing the Nomination

None

Date received by the World Heritage Centre

31 January 2015

Background

This is a new nomination.

Consultations

ICOMOS has consulted its International Scientific Committee on Cultural Landscapes and several independent experts.

Technical Evaluation Mission

A joint ICOMOS–IUCN technical evaluation mission visited the property from 28 September to 9 October 2015.

Additional information received by ICOMOS

On 22 September 2015, ICOMOS requested additional information on: the boundaries of buffer and transitional zones for the biosphere reserve and the buffer zone of the nominated property; aspects of traditional management; extension of the comparative analysis to cover cultural aspects; state of conservation of the cultural attributes; the management plan and how it addresses cultural aspects of the nomination. The State Party responded on 2 November 2015 and the additional information has been included in the relevant sections of this report.

Following the ICOMOS Panel meeting held in November 2015, on 16 December 2015 an Interim report was transmitted by ICOMOS to the State Party, explaining the reasons for ICOMOS' assessment and further requesting specific additional information. This included the expansion of the buffer zone so as to include areas in the transitional zone, where there are attributes relevant to the cultural dimensions of the property and which are able to support the protection of the nominated property.

The State Party responded on 22 February 2016 and the additional information has been assessed by ICOMOS and incorporated in the relevant sections of this report.

Date of ICOMOS approval of this report

11 March 2016

2 The property

Description

Khangchendzonga National Park (KNP) is located in the Himalaya range in northern India. It is a mountainous area that encompasses several peaks exceeding 6000m and 7000m in height, while Mt Khangchendzonga, which gives its name to the park, is the third highest peak in the world at 8586m.

The Khangchendzonga Massif determines the physiography of Sikkim; it is surrounded by five great ridges that run in five different directions. The elevation of the nominated property ranges from 1220m a.s.l. to 8586m over just 40km, as the crow flies. This rapid change in height influences the climate, the precipitation regimes, and subsequently the flora and fauna of the region. The nominated property exhibits a monsoon climate with an extended wet season; however, the climate also varies in relation to the altitude and exposure:

therefore both the temperature and the average rainfall may vary substantially from one watershed to another.

The massif is the source of two main rivers – the Teesta and the Rangit – which are fed by several glaciers. The whole area can be subdivided into seven river sub-basins; four rivers (Rangit, Prek, Churong, Lachen) flow in a north-south direction, while three flow from west to east (Lhonak, Zemu, Rangyong).

Geologically, the Himalayan main rock types belong to the metamorphic group. The soil features are variable but in general they are rather rich in organic matter. The area is very rich in glaciers (18 within the nominated property) and glacial lakes (73 within the nominated property).

Vegetation is articulated into four zones: subtropical (1200–2100m a.s.l.), temperate (2100–3100m a.s.l.), subalpine (3100–4100m a.s.l.), and alpine (4100–4500m a.s.l.). The different exposure, soil types and rainfall altogether contribute to the diversity of the flora for which Sikkim is known. The region is also rich in animal species.

Khangchendzonga National Park is part of a wider system of protected areas that links together areas in Nepal, China, Bhutan, and Darjeeling (India). KNP is also contiguous with the Khangchendzonga Conservation area on the western watershed of the massif, which is located in Nepal.

Subsistence systems for the inhabitants of the region include pastoralism, collection of medicinal plants, tourism and hunting. In 1998 a ban on pastoralist practices within the KNP was issued, but the practice continued in later years. Nevertheless, the park authorities are making progress in the implementation of the ban on grazing and the removal of cattle sheds.

Commercial exploitation of plants was allowed between the 1970s and the 1990s, although this was stopped in 2001, due to excessive depletion of plants. Hunting was a traditional practice, like the others described above, but it has now been banned in the park. Tourism seems to be the only activity to be permitted and fostered within the national park, and the State Party holds that it has improved the economic prospects and living conditions of the local communities.

The entire nominated property and many of its natural features are endowed with cultural meanings and sacred significance. This begins with the name of Khangchendzonga, which means the great snowy repository of five treasures: 1) salt, 2) gold and turquoise, 3) Buddhist scriptures, 4) arms, 5) medicines and seeds.

The core of the cultural significance of the property revolves around the notion of *beyul* or 'hidden land'. This concept is linked to the narrative on Guru Padmasambhava or Rinpoche or Second Buddha, who visited Sikkim in the 8th century and sanctified the whole region, naming it *beyul* or 'sacred hidden land', a paradise on earth. No boundaries were defined but the *beyul* was

divided into Highlands, Midlands and Lowlands, with Khangchendzonga sitting like a king on a throne, presiding over and protecting the upper region of the *beyul*.

Around the concept of *beyul* a number of religious texts and rituals have been elaborated. One of the first is Lama Gongdu: although ascribed to the 8th century, it was revealed in the 14th century by Terton Sangye Lingpa. This text forms the basis for subsequent compilations, e.g. the *Nay-Sol*, which includes the description of an offering ritual to all deities of the *beyul*, and the *Nay-Yig*, a more recent text based on a 14th century prophetic source, that contains a kind of guide to all sacred sites and treasures of the hidden land of Beyul Demojong.

Another important ritual associated with Khangchendzonga and the other guardian deities is the Pang Lhabsol, which was consolidated by the King of Sikkim in the 17th-18th century and is still performed annually. It includes an itinerary through the main Buddhist monasteries and notable natural features mentioned in sacred texts. This particular Buddhist ritual is interwoven with Lepcha rites, carried out by two shamans (*bungthings*) at the same time as Pang Lhabsol is performed - one in Northern and the other in Southern Sikkim. These rituals have been performed for over three centuries and, along with the texts wherein they are described, have played a crucial role in shaping Sikkimese identity and their relationship with the environment.

Tangible natural elements conveying the association with nature and making intelligible the sacred geography of the nominated property include: lakes, caves, sacred rocks, and sacred peaks. Conversely, manmade elements of the links between humans and the natural environment are the monasteries, the *chortens*, and the ruins of royal palaces.

Along with the Buddhist world-view there still persist indigenous Lepcha and Bhutia people's beliefs and world-views. Key elements of this cosmogony include: the notion of *Mayel Lyang*, which corresponds to the Lepcha's hidden land which, differently from the Buddhist *beyul*, is located along Khangchendzonga's slopes; the mountain god Kongchen (their name for Khangchendzonga) is the protector of the Lepcha people and a source of fertility and biodiversity; Lepcha clans trace their ancestry in the mountain peaks and lakes; after death, they are guided by the shaman through a passage-way to the land of their ancestors.

Sikkimese Bhutias migrated to Sikkim from Tibet from the 13th century onwards and have lived side by side with the Lepcha, from whom they adopted several aspects of their world-view, although retaining their own specificity. For instance, they believe that all natural elements of the landscape, including the fauna, are inhabited by supernatural beings or deities, and Khangchendzonga is revered as the chief of all deities. Damaging nature or its elements can cause illness or bad fortune and it is necessary to perform a healing ritual to rectify the offences.

History and development

The earliest known occupants of the region were the Lepcha, for whom no record of migration is known and who therefore could be regarded as the autochthonous inhabitants of Sikkim. The mythology narrates that the first couple of the Lepcha people were crafted out of the fresh snows of Mt. Khangchendzonga.

Religious records indicate that in the 8th century, Guru Padmasambhava, who consolidated Buddhism in Tibet and was revered as a Second Buddha, visited Sikkim and sanctified the land. He introduced Buddhism to Sikkim and is said to have hidden sacred Buddhist books in hidden places in the mountains.

The arrival of the Bhutias from Tibet in the 13th century was also marked in the mythological history, which records the friendship treaty made between the Lepcha and the Bhutias. An eternal friendship was established with Khangchendzonga.

In 1642 the Kingdom of Sikkim was established by three visionary lamas who enthroned the first King of Sikkim (Phuntsog Namgyal of Gangtok). The propagation of Buddhism occurred through the conversion of the Lepcha's sacred landscape, integrating its sacred features into the Buddhist sacred geography. Bhutias and Lepchas were joined by the Sikkimese Tsongs. These three populations signed an agreement with the King of Sikkim and, in this way, achieved political unity around and through the worship of the deities of the land. The third King of Sikkim, Chagdor Namgyal, institutionalised the festival of Pang Lhabso.

In the 19th century the first expedition visited the property and these continued in the 19th and 20th centuries. When Mt Khangchendzonga was first climbed in 1955, the expedition honoured the local community's beliefs and stopped short a few meters below the summit.

3 Justification for inscription, integrity and authenticity

Comparative analysis

The nomination dossier has developed the comparative analysis on three different levels: national, regional and global. However, it has only considered properties exhibiting natural values: out of 13 comparators, only one – Sakteng Wildlife Sanctuary, on the Tentative List of Bhutan – also includes one cultural criterion.

Therefore, ICOMOS asked the State Party to extend the comparative analysis in order to include consideration of the cultural values of the mixed nominated property.

The State Party responded on 2nd November 2015, providing an expanded comparison with an additional 18 cultural and mixed properties inscribed on the World Heritage List, properties included in the Tentative Lists of the States Parties, as well as properties not included in

either of the previous two and selected among those considered regionally and globally relevant.

ICOMOS considers that the expanded comparative analysis highlights the outstanding cultural significance of the Mount Khangchendzonga region and the distinctness of the attributes in respect to other similar properties. The region expresses multiple layers of sacredness for several groups of people – the Lepcha and the Sikkimese but also the Tibetan Buddhists, especially Nyingmapa, in and outside the region - well beyond the borders of Sikkim.

Similar to Papahānaumokuākea (USA, 2010, (iii), (vi), (viii), (ix) and (x)), although the environment is substantially different, the nominated property is an ancestral environment where the populations' ancestors are embedded in, and deeply linked to, the local peoples through kinship. According to the Sikkimese, Khangchendzonga is the place where all life is said to have been created – especially human – and where all the spirits return after death – guided along the rivers and into ravines. This form of spiritual significance extends beyond the indigenous people.

In ICOMOS' opinion, the comparison with other sacred mountains, while suggesting similarities, also underlines specific aspects of how associative values are manifested and attached to rituals performed, e.g. in the case of Fujisan (Japan, 2013, (iii) and (vi)), pilgrimages to the mountain are part of the worship practice; however, Khangchendzonga peak is worshipped from a distance.

ICOMOS considers that the comparative analysis justifies consideration of this property for the World Heritage List.

Justification of Outstanding Universal Value

The nominated property is considered by the State Party to be of Outstanding Universal Value as a cultural property for the following reasons:

- Mount Khangchendzonga, as well as other peaks and notable natural features within the nominated property and on its fringes, are held sacred and culturally significant by the Sikkimese communities;
- The fringes of the nominated property contain natural and manmade elements that are associated with, or used for, cultural and religious practices by the local communities.

ICOMOS observes that this justification may be considered generally appropriate, although it is rather generic as it does not illustrate adequately the distinctive cultural values embodied by this associative cultural landscape.

ICOMOS however considers that KNP is the heartland of a culture, which has evolved over time and includes several Sikkimese ethnic groups and a multi-layered

syncretic religious tradition that exists in a precious balance with nature – in its traditional use of resources, culture, and religion. The exceptional biodiversity of the region resonates in the deep indigenous cultural knowledge of the people inhabiting the region. Lepcha religious tradition fosters an exceptional relationship with the fragile environment surrounding them. These people have a vast knowledge of the medicinal plants in the KNP, that has been passed down from generation to generation. It is sacred knowledge and was included in the initiations of the religious specialists. The Lepcha community is on the verge of disappearing. The indigenous knowledge on flora and fauna, and of the medicinal properties of the plants, is quickly vanishing with changing lifestyle and the recent deaths of several prominent senior religious specialists. The protection of, and research on, this body of knowledge is important, not only for the Lepcha as a cultural tradition, but also for its potential worth in the field of medicine.

In summary, ICOMOS considers that the Outstanding Universal Value of the nominated property is expressed by the coexistence of multiple layers of sacred meaning, and of shamanic and Buddhist traditions, which appears crucial for the cultural significance of the nominated property. The cultural significance is portrayed by three main different facets: firstly, the notion of *beyul* or hidden sacred land, which extends to all of Sikkim but has its heart in the territory of Khangchendzonga National Park, is important in Tibetan Buddhism, not only intrinsic to Sikkim, but in the neighbouring countries and beyond – that is to say, the property is home to a sacred site of one of the world's leading religious traditions; secondly, the multi-layered sacred landscape of Khangchendzonga and the cultural and religious relevance of the hidden land (*beyul* in Tibetan Buddhism and *Mayel Lyang*, in Lepcha tradition) is specific to Sikkim and is a unique example of co-existence and exchange between different religious traditions and people; and thirdly, the indigenous religious and cultural practices of the Lepcha with regard to the ecology and the specific properties of local plants, which stand as an outstanding example of traditional knowledge and environmental preservation.

Integrity and authenticity

Integrity

The nomination dossier illustrates the conditions of integrity only taking into account natural values, features and processes, particularly those supporting criterion (x).

ICOMOS requested additional information on the cultural dimensions of the nominated property in order to clarify to what extent the nominated property includes attributes necessary to express the proposed Outstanding Universal Value and whether a significant proportion of the elements necessary to convey the totality of the value of the property are included.

Whilst ICOMOS notes that many manmade attributes related to the cultural expressions and traditional and

religious practices of the local communities and indigenous people lie within the buffer zone or the transitional zone of the Khangchendzonga Biosphere Reserve and even beyond, it also recognises that most of the notable natural features (mountain peaks, lakes, caves, groves) that shape the sacred geography embedded in the Lepcha and Sikkimese belief systems are located within the nominated property.

ICOMOS also notes that the key concept of *beyul*, or hidden sacred land, extends well beyond the boundaries of the nominated property, endowing the whole of Sikkim with a sacred meaning; however, Dzonga, Sikkim's guardian deity and the owner and protector of the land, resides on Mt. Khangchendzonga and it is on its slopes that *Mayel Lyang*, the Lepcha's mythological place where every tangible and intangible resource has its origin, is placed. Therefore, ICOMOS considers that the nominated property could be regarded as the centre of a much wider sacred landscape: as such it bears multiple layers of meanings, stories and notable places, and about which a profound knowledge has been developed, which nurture the sense of identity of all Sikkimese peoples.

On the other hand, since most of the relevant manmade features associated with religious practices performed by the Sikkimese can be found within the transitional zone of the Khangchendzonga Biosphere Reserve, ICOMOS considers that the current buffer zone should be extended to encompass the transitional zone, which contains a high density of cultural attributes that are functionally important as a support to the property and its protection.

In its interim report, ICOMOS asked the State Party to expand the buffer zone to include areas located in the transitional zone of the Biosphere Reserve. The State Party has responded in a positive manner. The details are discussed in the relevant sections; however, in terms of integrity, the proposed expansion reinforces the integrity of the nominated property and its protection.

It is, however, worth mentioning that the Khangchendzonga National Park and Biosphere Reserve borders the Kanchenjunga Conservation Area in Nepal. Therefore, ICOMOS observes that consideration should be given to assessing the feasibility of the possible extension to the Kanchenjunga Conservation Area in the future.

Authenticity

Authenticity of the cultural attributes within the proposed World Heritage boundary has been preserved. Although the tangible manmade attributes within the boundaries of the nominated property are restricted to various *chortens*, some smaller *gompas* and several sacred shrines linked to natural features such as rocks and lakes, their continued reverence, maintenance and possibly the rituals associated with the places attest that they could be held as credible witnesses of the proposed Outstanding Universal Value.

The source of information on their function and spiritual meaning is mainly the *Nay-Sol* text, revered by all Sikkimese. It tells of Lama Lhatsun Chenpo who cut his way through the Singaila Range and crossed the Kang La from Nepal into the hidden land, and performed an elaborate thanksgiving ritual dedicated to Dzonga who lives in Mount Khangchendzonga and is the protective deity of Sikkim. Additionally the *Nay-Yik* text provides information on natural features along specific routes, guiding those performing rituals or pilgrimages through the landscape, with information on the sacred lakes, caves, rocks and even trees. These natural features can still be traced in the landscape. Strict rules on behaviour ensure that the environment is not disturbed or harmed. Other earlier texts, the concept of *beyul*, rituals such as the Pang Lhabsol, the oral history and traditional knowledge of flora and fauna held by the Lepcha people, all contribute to the authenticity of the attributes.

In the additional information provided by the State Party on 2 November 2015, a table explaining how natural features contributing to the proposed Outstanding Universal Value has been prepared. It clarifies how natural features have been integrated into the Buddhist belief and ritual system and provides also some additional information on the association of the Lepcha with natural elements.

In conclusion, ICOMOS considers that the conditions of integrity and authenticity have been met.

Criteria under which inscription is proposed

The property is nominated on the basis of cultural criteria (iii), and natural criteria (vii) and (x).

Criterion (iii): *bear a unique or at least exceptional testimony to a cultural tradition or to a civilization which is living or which has disappeared;*

This criterion is justified by the State Party on the grounds that the nominated property contains a number of sacred peaks, caves, rocks and lakes associated with worship practices by Sikkimese populations such as the Lepchas, the Bhutias and the Limbus (or Tsongs). For each of these communities, Mount Khangchendzonga, the other peaks and a great number of natural elements (e.g. caves, rivers, lakes, waterfalls, rocks, etc.) are associated with mythological and cosmological stories and are the object of regular worship; kinship relations are also established between the mountains and the people.

Khangchendzonga is the focus of the rituals and festivals performed by the Sikkimese and by the Tibetan Buddhists, as the abode of Dzonga, Sikkim's guardian deity, who, in the 17th century, was also conferred the title of chief defender of the Dharma within Tibetan Buddhism.

ICOMOS considers that the justification of this criterion is grounded mainly in the meanings and the sacred significance attributed to notable natural features located within and on the fringes of the nominated property, and

appears mainly associative in nature. However, Buddhism has integrated these beliefs and has codified them through the precise description of the natural elements to be venerated in sacred texts which are regularly recited in the assemblies of the Sikkim monasteries.

ICOMOS also notes that, although the dossier focuses on Lhatsun Chenpo's activities and tradition (17th century; opening up of the *beyul*), there are also earlier narratives revolving around Guru Rinpoche (8th century; initiation of the Buddhist sanctity of the region, such as in Chungthang) as well as other Buddhist texts on the sacred hidden land, such as the prophetic source *Bras ljongs lung bstan gsal ba'i me long* by Rigdzin Godemchen (rig 'dzin rgod kyi Idem phru can).

The precise identification of natural features to be venerated, and associated stories and rituals in preserved sacred texts, justifies the application of this criterion.

However, In ICOMOS's view, the justification of this criterion is based on attributes that could also well support the justification of criterion (vi), which, although not proposed by the State Party, could reinforce the justification of this criterion.

ICOMOS considers that this criterion has been demonstrated but could be reinforced by criterion (vi).

Criteria not proposed by the State Party

Criterion (vi): *be directly or tangibly associated with events or living traditions, with ideas, or with beliefs, with artistic and literary works of outstanding universal significance;*

Although this criterion has not been proposed by the State Party, ICOMOS considers that the significance and the attributes of the property can also justify this criterion. KNP is the heartland of a culture which has evolved over time, includes several Sikkimese ethnic groups and a multi-layered syncretic religious tradition, and which exists in a profound relationship with the natural environment and its notable features.

This kinship is expressed by Mount Khangchendzonga being revered as *Mayel Lyang* by the indigenous peoples of Sikkim and as a *beyul* (sacred hidden land) in Tibetan Buddhism. This role is sustained by regularly-performed rituals: Buddhist lamas go every year to the vicinity of the peak of Khangchendzonga to perform a ritual which is believed to bring benefits, well-being and prosperity to the whole Sikkim population. It is a specific Sikkimese form of sacred mountain cult which is shared by the communities linked to Tibetan cultures.

An even more important ritual is performed at the end of the monsoon season in all Sikkimese monasteries and is known under the name of *Pang Lhabsol*: it celebrates Mount Khangchendzonga as a deity protecting the

territory and giving peace and prosperity, and it can involve dances with elaborate masks.

The kinship between the human communities and the mountainous environment has nurtured the elaboration of a profound and well-developed traditional knowledge of the natural resources and of their medicinal properties, particularly within the Lepcha community, which deserves to be safeguarded and continued.

In summary, all the above demonstrates that Mount Khangchendzonga is the central element of the socio-religious order, of the unity and solidarity of the ethnically very diverse Sikkimese communities, which is conveyed through a variety of tangible and intangible attributes.

ICOMOS considers that this criterion is justified.

In conclusion, ICOMOS considers that the nominated property meets criteria (iii) and (vi) and conditions of authenticity and integrity.

Description of the attributes

Mount Khangchendzonga and its Massif, as well as the natural and manmade features, together are conceptualised as 'hidden sacred land', both by Buddhists, under the name of *beyul*, and by the indigenous people, as *Mayel Lyang*. These features are worshipped and mentioned in ancient sacred texts or included in indigenous and Buddhist rituals being, or having been, performed in the region, embodying the links between the living communities and their environment in a sacred geography. The ensemble of the myths, stories and notable events, as well as the sacred texts themselves, convey and make manifest the cultural meanings projected onto natural resources and the indigenous and specific Buddhist cosmogony that developed in the Himalayan region. The indigenous traditional knowledge of the properties of local plants and the local ecosystem which is peculiar to local peoples could develop only thanks to their deep understanding of, and relationship with, their environment: it is on the verge of disappearing and represents a precious source of information on the healing properties of several endemic plants. The traditional and ritual management system of forests and natural resources of the land pertaining to Buddhist monasteries expresses the active dimension of Buddhist cosmogonies and could contribute to the property's effective management.

4 Factors affecting the property

The nominated property and the buffer zone of the national park have no permanent inhabitants, therefore no development pressures are expected from existing communities. The main threats mentioned to the natural aspects of the property are pastoralism, hunting and feral dogs. A ban on cattle grazing has been issued and applied, and today there are no permanent cattle sheds

within the National Park. Measures to counteract poaching and feral dogs have been initiated.

The increase of tourism is indicated as a serious source of pollution that needs to be controlled, especially when considering the increase of tourism over the last decade.

ICOMOS notes that the nomination dossier mentions only factors that may have impacts on attributes related to natural values and does not deal with possible threats to the cultural dimensions of the nominated property. In this regard, ICOMOS notes that measures adopted to grant protection to natural features, e.g. the relocation of the inhabitants outside the national park and the ban on cattle grazing, although carried out in regulated phases, certainly have impacts on both the possibility of nurturing spiritual ties with the environment and to continue the traditional activities of the local communities, made up essentially of herders.

ICOMOS considers that the increase in tourism, combined with the discouragement of traditional activities such as cattle grazing, or traditional medicinal plant collecting, may lead to the weakening of the cultural ties and to the loss of traditional knowledge within the local communities, in the absence of reasons for its transmission to younger generations.

ICOMOS also notes that a major threat to these areas comes from plans to build hydroelectric dams. There have, however, been successful campaigns that have stopped all the dam projects that would impact on any part of the national park or buffer zone. This type of threat as well as large infrastructure developments need, however, to be carefully monitored in the future.

Finally, ICOMOS notes that development pressures exist in the town areas within the transitional zone. This requires long-term strategies and stringent planning instruments to be controlled and readdressed.

Measures to readdress how construction and renovation works are carried out within the monasteries and monuments, mainly in the transitional zone, would also be very useful.

ICOMOS considers that the main threats to the property from a cultural perspective are the impacts of modernisation on the traditional communities, along with the difficulties of continuing traditional occupations, and the increase in tourism.

5 Protection, conservation and management

Boundaries of the nominated property and buffer zone

The boundaries of the nominated property coincide with the limits of Khangchendzonga National Park, while its

buffer zone is the same as the buffer zone of the Khangchendzonga Biosphere reserve.

The transitional zone of the Khangchendzonga Biosphere Reserve apparently has been excluded from the buffer zone of the nominated property.

ICOMOS notes that the boundaries of the nominated property include the key natural features that express the cultural significance and sacred nature of Khangchendzonga as the *beyul* and *Mayel Lyang*, that is, the hidden treasured land.

On the other hand, ICOMOS notes that in certain areas of the transitional zone there are several monuments and monasteries, the integrity and authenticity of which, however, could be questionable in terms of historic material to be included within the nominated property. They, however, represent attributes that are functionally important as a support to the property and its protection, and contribute to improving the understanding of the sacred geography of Mt Khangchendzonga.

In its interim report, ICOMOS asked the State Party to expand the buffer zone so as to include man-made features bearing cultural significance as a support for the protection of the nominated property.

The State Party responded on 22 February 2016 explaining that a community consultation was carried out on the proposed extension of the buffer zone to include portions of the transitional zone. The result of this consultation led to the extension of the buffer zone to include 10 sites in the Yuksam region containing man-made cultural attributes with direct connection with the cultural dimensions of the nominated property.

It was found that, although other sites exist that relate to the cultural values of the nominated property, they are either traditionally protected as *gya-ra* and *gya-nak* surrounding the monasteries, or are only generically linked to the nominated property and their inclusion in the buffer zone was not seen as feasible, due to their distant locations. These sites are nevertheless protected in traditional ways.

ICOMOS considers that the proposal from the State Party meets the request made by ICOMOS, although it encourages the State Party to continue the dialogue with the local communities with a view to possibly integrating into the buffer zone further areas with relevant man-made attributes. ICOMOS equally recommends that interpretation programmes be set up in order to connect the nominated property, its attributes, and other cultural sites related to the values of the nominated property, which are located outside the property and its buffer zone.

In conclusion, ICOMOS considers that the boundaries of the nominated property are considered adequate; following the proposal for its expansion by the State Party, the buffer zone can be considered adequate.

Ownership

The nominated property is comprised of State-owned land.

Protection

The nominated property was designated as a National Park in 1977 under notification n. 43(9)Home/77 26th August 1977, covering an initial area of 850sqkm and then extended to cover 1784sqkm under notification n. 1/KNP/WL/F/27 19th May 1997. The protection of natural features has been strengthened through specific ordinances.

The buffer zone is protected as a Forest Reserve under the Indian and Sikkim relevant legislation.

From a cultural perspective, Sikkim has a department for Ecclesiastical Affairs which is responsible for managing religious monuments and complexes and for preserving Sikkim's Buddhist cultural heritage. In 1998 the Home Department of the Government of Sikkim issued a notification (n.59/Home/98) that prohibits the conversion of sites, the defilement of sacred lakes, and the scaling of sacred peaks, as they are believed to be the abode of deities. Subsequently, another notification (n.70/Home/2001) has identified specific sacred peaks, caves, rocks, lakes, stupas, and hot-springs as the most sacred Buddhist places for worship, and protects them under the above-mentioned notification and the Places of Worship Act (1991).

The protection of the sacred landscape and the cultural attributes is achieved through the traditional protection system defined in the ritual scripture of the *Nay-Sol* and *Nay-Yik*. The reverence accorded to the sacred landscape by the local communities ensures that this pristine landscape is protected.

ICOMOS notes that the above-mentioned legislation is of great importance in protecting the natural features with cultural significance, although it also notes that only three out of the several monasteries are under the protection of the Archaeological Survey of India, while the other ones are managed by the monks and the local communities.

ICOMOS also notes that the protection of the religious sites within the transitional zone is, however, not as clear as the protection granted within the national park. Due to the nature of the living traditions, these sites are constantly undergoing change, in many cases change that would not be considered appropriate for a heritage site. In this regard, ICOMOS recommends that conservation guidelines be elaborated and used to carry out conservation and rehabilitation interventions in the monasteries and other religious sites, so as to retain their surviving heritage features. Additionally, forms of regulation and control over urban development are necessary to reduce the impact of building pressures on the qualities of the landscape.

In the additional information provided, the State Party articulates on the form of protection/management granted

to the forest areas surrounding the monasteries. They comprise two zones; the inner and closer to the monastery is named *gya-ra*, whilst the second, further one *gya-nak*. The first is a sacred space, well demarcated and strictly regulated in its use in all monasteries up to the present day, and no damage can be caused to any natural feature; a specific set of rules exist to regulate the behaviour of the people in relation to this area. The wider area, *gya-nak*, is under the jurisdiction of each monastery and is where they get their resources; in general no tree can be felled; however, when necessary, monks decide which tree needs to be felled and replaced. Although still in existence, the state of conservation of this area may vary from one monastery to another. In the nominated property and its buffer zone, the *gya-nak* are generally well maintained, although in some cases rules have been relaxed and a limited amount of cattle and grazing are today permitted.

Finally, ICOMOS notes that the ban on permanent or temporary residence and activity within the boundary of the nominated property and its buffer zone, except for tourists, may, in the medium- and the long-term, undermine the links between the living community and its sacred environment, especially those indigenous groups whose culture is on the verge of disappearing.

Due to the specific nature of the associative values of the property, based on the concept of *beyul* and *Mayel Lyang*, that is, the hidden treasured land, which could virtually be extended to the whole of Sikkim, ICOMOS considers that, although not included in the nominated property or in the buffer zone, a number of sites, including Tashiding and its setting, Dzongu valley, and Pemayangtse, need to be protected and integrated into the interpretation and communication of the values of the nominated property.

In conclusion, ICOMOS considers that the legal protection in place for those natural features having cultural significance are adequate within the boundary of the nominated property and of the buffer zone. Three monasteries are legally protected by the Archaeological Survey of India, while the other ones are under the jurisdiction of Sikkim's Department for Ecclesiastical Affairs. If in the nominated property and in the buffer zone protective measures may be considered adequate for cultural attributes, in the transitional zone, protection and regulatory measures for the built heritage and the built-up areas would assist in retaining heritage features in the religious structures associated with the beliefs and rituals performed at the nominated property, as well as in maintaining their landscape qualities. ICOMOS also considers that a number of sites outside the nominated property and its buffer zone need to be equally protected as they bear cultural significance that relates to the value of the property and facilitate its understanding.

Conservation

A traditional inventory system exists in the form of the ritual scriptures of the *Nay-Sol* and especially the *Nay-Yik*. They detail rituals and offerings to be made to

Khangchendzonga and other guardian deities of Sikkim and also describe the sacred landscape and location of the sacred sites. The descriptions of the sacred landscape and notable sacred features would need to be taken as the basis for future conservation. The continued recording of sacred features is needed as a basic monitoring mechanism within the management system.

The sacred landscape with its associative values linked to natural attributes of the proposed World Heritage property is well conserved. Questions arising from the state of conservation of the natural component of the site would need to be referred to the IUCN report. However, these would be closely linked to the natural attributes with associative cultural values.

ICOMOS notes that monasteries have undergone major changes, especially after the damage caused by the recent earthquakes in September 2011 and April 2015.

Reconstruction work has included the use of cement plaster and new structures are being constructed using reinforced cement concrete frames. The main Tashiding *gompa* was restored after the earthquakes, with additional rooms being added in the four corners. A new parking structure is being constructed right next to the main Pemayangtse *gompa*.

These sites still retain their significance in respect to rituals, spirit and feeling, and within the overall cultural landscape of the Beyul Demojong or the "hidden fruitful valley". However, the above-mentioned interventions reduce the ability to understand them as important sacred sites and detract from their landscape value.

There are, however, two cultural attributes that need to be dealt with more specifically: the *gompas* in Tshoka and near Charmani. At Tshoka, a timber structure from the 1960s, functioning as a community religious building, has been slightly neglected since the community was moved down to Yuksom. Efforts must be made to continue the maintenance and use of this *gompa*.

On the other hand, the *gompa* near Charmani has collapsed and its reconstruction would need to be handled with utmost care, since the landscape here is impressive and pristine and inappropriate work may compromise the silhouette of the four *chortens* against the backdrop of Mt Pandim. A Heritage Impact Assessment should be undertaken in case reconstruction is proposed.

In general, in ICOMOS' view, it would be advisable for the State Party to work on introducing conservation mechanisms to ensure the retention of the heritage qualities, authenticity and integrity of man-made cultural structures and features within the nominated property, its buffer zone and the Khangchendzonga Biosphere Reserve transitional zone.

In conclusion, ICOMOS considers that inventories of heritage and culturally-relevant natural features based on the sacred texts need to be developed for

conservation and monitoring purposes. Guidelines for the conservation of the religious structures need to be developed and applied. Particular attention to the landscape values of these structures should be paid in any intervention.

Management

Management structures and processes, including traditional management processes

An institutional management system has been established for the Khangchendzonga National Park as defined by the national legislation (Khangchendzonga National Park Management Plan 2008-2015). This system focuses on the natural heritage sites and ensures the highest level of protection with regard to natural values. Further information on this will be found in the IUCN evaluation report.

The management for the man-made and certain natural features bearing cultural significance is based on a traditional system which follows the regulations and belief system defined in the *Nay-Sol* and *Nay-Yik* documents. This management practice has been in place for many generations and defined how the landscape was maintained.

A coordination committee has been formed which includes authorities and experts in both natural and cultural heritage. This coordinative committee needs to be given a formal mandate with regular meetings to ensure communication between those managing the natural and those managing the cultural dimensions of the heritage attributes.

The above traditional management system could be adequate to ensure that the cultural components and dimensions of the associative cultural landscape are safeguarded. However, ICOMOS noted that the nomination dossier does not adequately explain the traditional system and how this would function in conjunction with the management system for those natural features bearing cultural significance.

In the additional information submitted by the State Party in November 2015, an outline of the management system for cultural attributes is provided. This additional information clarifies that the Ecclesiastical Department is responsible only for the built religious heritage outside the National Park, therefore the cultural attributes and dimensions of the nominated property need to be integrated into the management system. To this end, local eco-development committees have been established, in which the villages of the transitional zones are also included, to cooperate with the National Park Administration in the protection and management of the property.

The outline for the integrated management envisages the development of a partnership between the Department of Forest, Environment and Wildlife Management, the pivotal

management body for the National Park, the Ecclesiastical Department of Sikkim, the Culture and Heritage Affairs Department, as well as the Namgyal Institute of Tibetology.

The framework also identifies priority objectives, including strengthening local communities' participation in the management, increasing the awareness of the tangible and intangible cultural attributes of Khangchendzonga National Park and of the need for their protection and promotion, contributing to the living conditions and economic development of the local communities, extending the protection of the values and their attributes in the buffer zone.

The additional information clearly underlines the need for an integrated management system for both natural and cultural values and attributes that is also capable of combining formal and traditional, as well as participatory management approaches.

ICOMOS concurs with the State Party that there is a need to set up a robust management framework in which all relevant management agencies, local authorities and local communities are involved and assigned clear roles and tasks.

Policy framework: management plans and arrangements, including visitor management and presentation

The additional information submitted by the State Party in November 2015 envisages supporting the management system and existing management plan through a conservation and a maintenance plan. It also mentions the need to develop a visitor plan, accompanied by an interpretation outreach. A risk management plan is also mentioned and the key threats to be addressed have been identified.

ICOMOS concurs with the State Party that there is a strong and urgent need to develop a set of management measures that deal with the cultural attributes of the property as well as those in its buffer and transitional zones. ICOMOS, however, also notes that this set of plans is yet to be drafted and therefore suggests the State Party develops an implementation calendar with different phases of implementation and priorities of action, as a roadmap to achieving effective implementation of the many and complex objectives and measures outlined in the management section of the additional information provided.

In this regard, ICOMOS in its interim report of 16 December 2015 asked the State Party to explain how the management of cultural attributes will be strengthened and integrated into the existing management system which addresses only natural attributes. ICOMOS also found it necessary to understand how existing traditional management systems and traditional knowledge will be integrated into the institutionalised management of the property.

The State Party responded that the man-made cultural attributes are under the responsibility of the Ecclesiastical and the Culture Departments, with limited monitoring activities. On the other hand, the natural attributes bearing cultural significance are protected under the Wild Life Protection Act. In order to improve protection and management implementation, there is now the intention to involve the Eco-Development Committees (EDC's) in the protection and daily management of the cultural attributes within the nominated property, in addition to their responsibilities in managing the natural resources. Local communities will carry out monitoring and regular inspection. This additional task has been formalised through the establishment of a new executive body for culture which will cooperate with the park authorities. Additionally, a multi-disciplinary and interdepartmental advisory body for culture, headed by the Chief Secretary of the State, has been established. This body includes representatives from the Departments of Culture, Ecclesiastical Affairs, Tourism, Finance, Forestry and the Namgyal Institute of Tibetology. The advisory body will formulate policies and guidelines to ensure an integrated management of cultural and natural attributes.

ICOMOS believes that the role and action of the EDC's is crucial also for the management of the cultural attributes and recommends that the proposal to extend the tasks of the EDC's to the cultural dimensions and attributes is fundamental to ensuring the participatory management of the cultural attributes within the nominated property.

Involvement of the local communities

The history of the nomination shows that, eventually, local communities found ways to be involved in the nomination. However, in ICOMOS' view, it is crucial that their inclusion in the management and protection of the property be reinforced through ad-hoc management actions and strategies.

In its interim report, ICOMOS asked the State Party to explain how local communities will be involved in the management of the property and its expanded buffer zone.

The State Party replied that the local communities already play an important role in the management of the natural resources of the KNP through the EDC's, since 2001. There are 21 of them and they consist of a general assembly formed by representatives of each household living in the villages at the fringes of the KNP. This assembly elects the executive body of the EDC (33% of the seats are reserved for women) which comprise between 5 to 11 members (one or two seats are reserved ex-officio to panchayat members). EDC's undertake micro-planning through a participatory approach in rural appraisal. These micro-plans are compiled in an Annual Management Action Plan for the Park which is approved by the Executive Body of the KNP and Khangchendzonga Biosphere Reserve (KBR).

It is envisaged that the management of the cultural attributes will be integrated into the EDC Annual Management Action Plan and implemented by the EDC's.

ICOMOS considers that the State Party has provided important additional information with regard to the traditional knowledge of the local communities and indigenous people that can give added value to management if effectively integrated into the overall management system.

ICOMOS, however, recommends that in addition to the representatives of the local communities, the staff of cultural heritage protection authorities and researchers should also be actively involved in the preparation of the section of the management plan concerning the cultural dimensions of the nominated property and in its integration into an overall management plan.

ICOMOS considers that the integration of the advisory body and of the new executive body into the existing management structure is crucial to ensuring the effective consideration of cultural values. Nonetheless, the management framework would benefit from a clarification of roles and responsibilities. Extending the role of the Eco-Development Committees to also address the cultural heritage represents a valid option; however, a capacity-building strategy encompassing the cultural dimensions of the property needs to be envisaged and put in place. ICOMOS considers that, from a cultural perspective, the management system should be extended to include both the buffer zone and the transitional zone, for which stringent regulations in terms of spatial planning and landscape consideration should be elaborated. The envisaged set of ad-hoc plans should be further developed. To this end, the elaboration of a phased implementation calendar would assist the State Party in achieving its objectives. Furthermore, ICOMOS recommends that, in the protection and management of natural resources, consideration also be given to the deep ties and associations that local communities have developed with nature over several centuries to build and nurture their world-view.

6 Monitoring

The monitoring system described in the nomination dossier addresses only natural resources and values. There is an urgent need to integrate into the monitoring system specific indicators to monitor changes to tangible and intangible cultural attributes, as well as to evaluate the effectiveness of management strategies and activities.

In its interim report, ICOMOS requested further information from the State Party on how the monitoring system will monitor the advancement of objectives and measures for the protection and management of the sacred values of the nominated property.

The State Party responded on 22 February, providing a carefully prepared list of objectives to be pursued in order to ensure that the notion of *beyul* is transmitted in its full integrity, and corresponding measures to achieve these objectives. These include legal and regulatory measures as well as a management approach (see previous sections of this report). A monitoring table has also been prepared.

ICOMOS considers that the objectives and related measures are well thought-out; on the other hand, the monitoring remains too generic, with no specific qualitative or quantitative indicators. In this regard, further work is necessary.

In conclusion, ICOMOS considers that the monitoring system should be extended to also cover the cultural attributes and the effective management of both natural and cultural attributes.

7 Conclusions

Located in the Himalayan range in northern India, Khangchendzonga National Park (KNP) is a mountainous area including several peaks exceeding 6000m and 7000m in height, with Mt Khangchendzonga reaching 8586m a.s.l. Mount Khangchendzonga and many natural features within the nominated property are endowed with cultural meaning and sacred significance, and represent the centre of Sikkim's indigenous peoples' cosmogonies, which were later integrated into Buddhist belief and constitute the base for Sikkimese identity and unity.

KNP is the heartland of a culture, which has evolved over time and includes several Sikkimese ethnic groups and a multi-layered syncretic religious tradition, that exists in a precious balance with nature – in its traditional use of resources, its culture, and its religion.

The nomination dossier and the additional information provided by the State Party have succeeded in demonstrating the Outstanding Universal Value of the nominated property.

ICOMOS congratulates the State Party for submitting such an important and complex property, in which natural and cultural values are closely and deeply intertwined.

By this nomination, the State Party has demonstrated an important commitment towards the multi-layered and exceptional natural and cultural significance of the property, its protection and perpetuation.

The nomination of Khangchendzonga as a mixed property represents the first step in protecting and strengthening cultural meanings and associative ties between the local communities and their environment, which has been negatively impacted by measures adopted in past decades, to ensure the protection of the KNP's natural values.

Some of the indigenous populations are today on the verge of disappearing and, with them, their culture and knowledge. There is therefore a need for an effort, based on a convincing participatory approach, to strengthen the safeguarding of the cultural attributes and to provide the local communities with means to sustain their livelihood, their traditional way of life and their culture. These means should not be limited to tourism or tourism-related activities but should encompass traditional activities, as well as their contemporary sustainable reinterpretation.

To succeed in this challenge, the involvement of the local communities and of the indigenous people in the management is crucial, and should be supported and accompanied by an adequate framework, measures and means.

Already during the nomination process, the State Party has initiated important steps towards a management that integrates the cultural and natural significance of the property and its attributes.

The additional information submitted in February 2016 demonstrates the full engagement of the State Party and of the State Authorities in ensuring the effective protection and management of the nominated property. The extension of the buffer zone, as requested by ICOMOS, to include at least part of the transitional zone of the Biosphere Reserve where there are important sites bearing cultural significance, represents an important step in a process that needs to be continued so as to ensure that relevant attributes or sites within the transitional zone be encompassed within the buffer zone of the property, as understood within the World Heritage context. In this regard, the extension of the management system and mechanisms to the transitional zone and the cultural attributes located therein, appears very important.

8 Recommendations

ICOMOS recommends that the World Heritage Committee adopts the following draft decision, noting that this will be harmonised as appropriate with the recommendations of IUCN regarding their evaluation of this mixed site nomination under the natural criteria and included in the working document WHC/16/40.COM/8B.

Recommendations with respect to inscription

ICOMOS recommends that Khangchedzonga National Park, India, be inscribed on the World Heritage List as a cultural landscape on the basis of **cultural criteria (iii) and (vi)**.

Recommended Statement of Outstanding Universal Value

Brief synthesis

Located in the Himalayan range in northern India, Khangchendzonga National Park (KNP) is a mountainous area including several peaks exceeding 6000m and 7000m in height, and Mt Khangchendzonga, reaching

8586m a.s.l. The homonymous Massif determines the physiography of Sikkim. The rapid change in height of the nominated area (from 1220m to 8586m a.s.l. in just 40km, as the crow flies) has a strong influence on the climate, the precipitation regimes, and the variety of the flora and fauna of the region. Mount Khangchendzonga and many natural features within the property and its wider setting are endowed with deep cultural meanings and sacred significance, giving form to the multi-layered landscape of Khangchendzonga, which is sacred as a hidden land both to Buddhists (*Beyul*) and to Lepchas as *Mayel Lyang*, representing a unique example of co-existence and exchange between different religious traditions and ethnicities, constituting the base for Sikkimese identity and unity. The ensemble of myths, stories and notable events, as well as the sacred texts themselves, convey and make manifest the cultural meanings projected onto natural resources and the indigenous and specific Buddhist cosmogony that developed in the Himalayan region.

The indigenous traditional knowledge of the properties of local plants and the local ecosystem, which is peculiar to local peoples, is on the verge of disappearing and represents a precious source of information on the healing properties of several endemic plants. The traditional and ritual management system of forests and the natural resources of the land pertaining to Buddhist monasteries express the active dimension of Buddhist cosmogonies and could contribute to the property's effective management.

Criterion (iii): The property – with Mount Khangchendzonga and other sacred mountains – represents the core sacred region of the Buddhist, Sikkimese, Lepcha and syncretistic religious and cultural traditions and thus bears unique witness to the coexistence of multiple layers of both Buddhist and pre-Buddhist sacred meanings in the same region, with the abode of mountain deities on Mt Khangchendzonga. The property is central to the Buddhist understanding of Sikkim as a *beyul*, that is, an intact site of religious ritual and cultural practice for Tibetan Buddhists in Sikkim, in neighbouring countries and all over the world. The sacred Buddhist importance of the place begins in the 8th century with Guru Rinpoche's initiation of the Buddhist sanctity of the region, and later appears in Buddhist scriptures such as the prophetic text known as the Lama Gongdu, revealed by Terton Sangye Lingpa (1340-1396), followed by the opening of the *beyul* in the 17th century, chiefly by Lhatsun Namkha Jigme.

Criterion (vi): Khangchedzonga National Park is the heartland of a multi-ethnic culture which has evolved over time, giving rise to a multi-layered syncretic religious tradition, which centres on the natural environment and its notable features. This kinship is expressed by Mount Khangchendzonga being revered as *Mayel Lyang* by the indigenous peoples of Sikkim and as a *beyul* (sacred hidden land) in Tibetan Buddhism. It is a specific Sikkimese form of sacred mountain cult which is sustained by regularly-performed rituals, both by Lepcha people and Tibetan Buddhists, the latter performing two rituals: the

nesol and the *Pang Lhabsol*. The kinship between the human communities and the mountainous environment has nurtured the elaboration of a profound traditional knowledge of the natural resources and of their properties, particularly within the Lepcha community. Mount Khangchendzonga is the central element of the socio-religious order, of the unity and solidarity of the ethnically very diverse Sikkimese communities.

Integrity

Most of the notable natural features, such as mountain peaks, lakes, caves, glaciers, groves, and the key man-made features that shape the sacred geography embedded in the Lepcha and Sikkimese belief systems, are included in the property. Dzonga, Sikkim's guardian deity and the owner and protector of the land, resides on Mount Khangchendzonga and, on its slopes, *Mayel Lyang*, the Lepcha's mythological place, is located. On the other hand, the Buddhist concept of *beyul*, or hidden sacred land, extends well beyond the boundaries of the property, endowing the whole of Sikkim with a sacred meaning.

Therefore, other man-made attributes that are functionally important as a support to the cultural significance of the property, its protection and its understanding, are located in the buffer zone, in the Khangchendzonga Biosphere Reserve, and in the wider setting of the property. The integrity of the associative values and of traditional knowledge has been impacted by past policies for environmental protection, changes in lifestyle and discouragement of traditional practices for subsistence.

Authenticity

The authenticity of the cultural attributes within the proposed World Heritage boundary has been preserved. Although the tangible man-made attributes within the property are restricted to some *chortens*, *gompas* and several sacred shrines associated with revered natural features, their continued reverence, maintenance and the associated rituals attest that they bear credible witness to the property's Outstanding Universal Value. Sources of information on the associative values of the property and its attributes comprise the *Nay-Sol* and the *Nay-Yik* texts, which provide important information on the stories, the rituals and the associated natural features as well as the still-performed rituals, the oral history and the traditional knowledge held by the Lepcha.

Management and protection requirements

The property comprises state-owned land and has been protected as a National Park since 1977, whilst the buffer zone is protected as a Forest Reserve.

Natural features having cultural significance are protected by notifications, n.59/Home/98 and n. 70/Home/2001, issued by the Government of Sikkim. They identify the sacred features and regulate their use as places of worship. Some of the monasteries fall under the protection of the Archaeological Survey of India, while other ones are

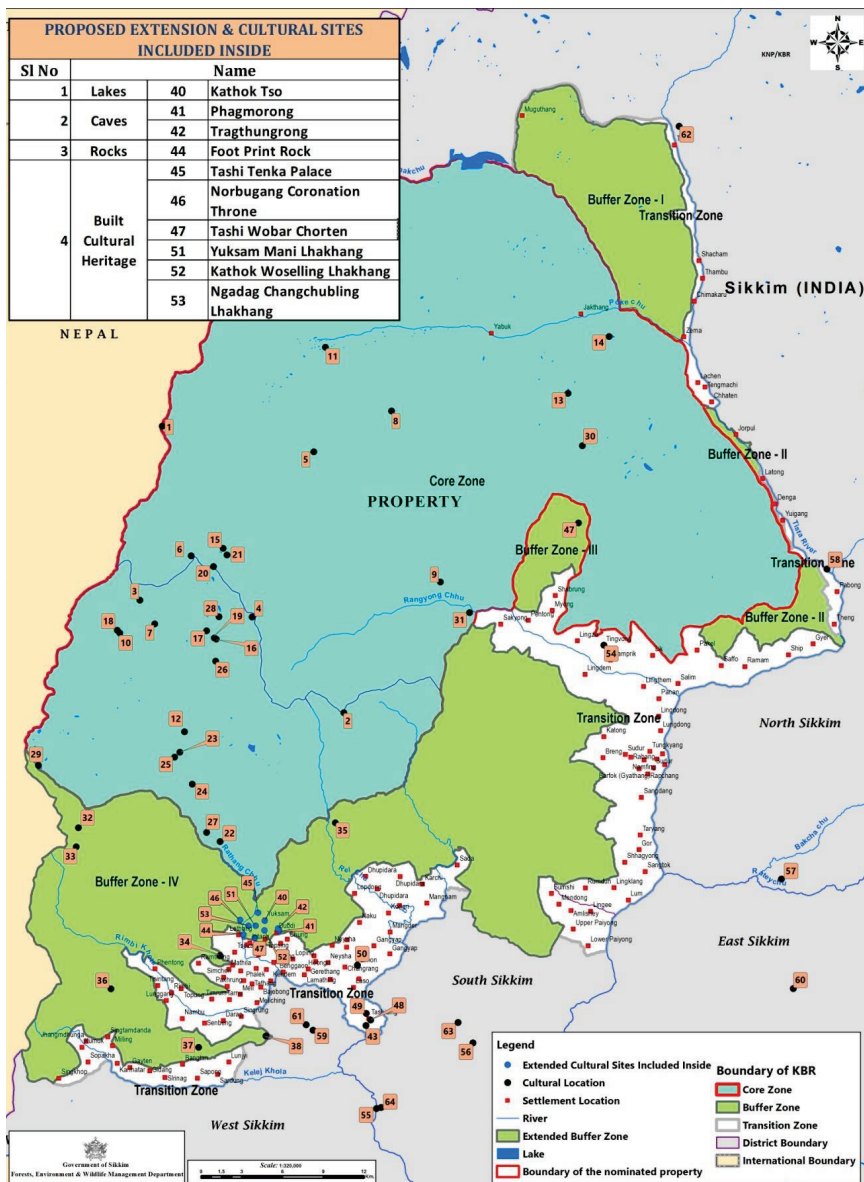
managed by monastic and local communities through traditional management systems that extend to the immediate and wider settings of the monasteries (*gya-ra* and *gya-nak* zones).

The institutional management is carried out by the Department of Forests, Environment and Wildlife, which addresses mainly natural aspects. However, a partnership is envisaged with the Ecclesiastical Department of Sikkim, the Department of Cultural Heritage Affairs and the Namgyal Institute of Tibetology, to ensure that consideration of cultural values and attributes are integrated into the existing management. A participatory approach to management exists through the Eco-Development Committees (EDC's): their role in monitoring and inspection is planned to also be extended to cultural aspects and attributes. From a cultural perspective, the extension of the traditional and participatory management to cultural attributes located in the buffer and transitional zones would greatly assist the effective protection of the cultural values, and the reinforcement of cultural ties and traditional knowledge of the local communities with their environment.

Additional recommendations

ICOMOS further recommends that the State Party gives consideration to the following:

- Finalizing and implementing the envisaged management system and related mechanisms, and extend it to the transitional zone in order to allow the full understanding of the cultural significance of the property and of associated cultural sites;
- Preparing an implementation calendar for the finalisation of the management system and for the actions envisaged in the additional information submitted in November 2015;
- Developing inventories of natural and man-made features that are mentioned in sacred texts, for conservation and monitoring purposes and of their state of conservation; paying careful attention to the landscape value of religious structures when planning maintenance or restoration activities;
- Putting in place protection and regulatory measures for the built heritage and the built-up areas in the transitional zones to assist in retaining their heritage features and improving their landscape characteristics; extending the monitoring system to the cultural dimensions of natural and man-made attributes and setting up qualitative and quantitative indicators;
- Preparing and submitting an updated report on the implementation of the above mentioned recommendations, along with an implementation calendar for the envisaged actions, by 1 December 2016, for review by the World Heritage Centre and the Advisory Bodies.



Revised map showing the boundaries of the nominated property



Khangchendzonga seen from Khangchendzonga National Park



One of the high altitude lake in Khangchendzonga National Park



The *chortens* of Du Tsen Lu Sum



The permanent Lepcha open air altar of Kusung-Lingko (Tingvong)



The *chortens* of Tashiding



Sikkim's chief guardian deity during Pang Lhabsol at Pemayangtse monastery