With around half of the world’s population living in urban areas today, in addition to the projected growth of urbanization for the coming decade, the pressure on historic cities and their historic urban landscape will continue to mount. Urban and landscape conservation are thus likely to become one of the most dynamic and daunting tasks of our time. Subsequently, in recent years the debates at World Heritage Committee sessions involving high-rise constructions and contemporary architectural interventions at World Heritage sites have increased dramatically.

With some 200 historic cities or city centres inscribed on the World Heritage List (and the numbers are rising each year), the Committee expects in the near future that more and more time will be needed to discuss cases where urban development and contemporary architecture are threatening existing cultural-historic values - most importantly the outstanding universal value for which the property was included on the World Heritage List.

During its 27th session in 2003 in Paris, the Committee called for the organization of an international conference to discuss how to properly regulate the needs for modernization of our daily urban environment, while at the same time safeguarding the irreplaceable heritage that our historic cities constitute. In response, the WHC, in co-operation with the City of Vienna and ICOMOS, organized the international conference ‘World Heritage and Contemporary Architecture – Managing the Historic Urban Landscape’ which took place in Vienna, Austria from 12 to 14 May and was hosted by the Austrian Government.

Over 600 experts and professionals from 55 countries attended the Conference and discussed 70 case studies involving high-rise or contemporary architectural interventions in historic cities and urban landscapes of heritage value. There was widespread agreement that criteria and guidelines for conservation management of the historic urban landscape are urgently needed and that existing charters and recommendations in this regard are no longer sufficient.

For this reason, a Draft Memorandum outlining such criteria and guidelines was developed prior to the conference by the WHC, ICOMOS and ICCROM, as well as partner organizations: Organization of World Heritage Cities, International Federation of Landscape Architects, International Union of Architects and International Federation for Housing and Planning. The debates and comments during the Conference reframed this document into what is now labelled as the Vienna Memorandum, to be presented to the Committee at its 29th session in Durban, South Africa this coming July. UNESCO welcomes and promotes contemporary cultural expressions, including modern architecture. However, there are obviously limits to what to plan, design and build when working in valuable historic environments which were selected for inclusion on the World Heritage List. A World Heritage site is not just any other site and it requires special treatment. Therefore, high-rise constructions should be positioned sufficiently away from historic areas where they cannot disturb sensitive balances in the built environment, or obstruct views to historical landmarks and landscapes.

The Committee, in its pro-active role to prevent possible future problems, asked for this Conference to facilitate public debate, bring different viewpoints to the fore and reach consensus about minimum requirements to be taken into account when dealing with complex urban environments subject to change. If it decides to adopt the Vienna Memorandum, we will have an additional tool to discuss, evaluate and assess future cases involving high-rise constructions and contemporary interventions in urban environments of heritage significance. The individual countries will then be invited to use this new tool and make it operational within their own policies and strategies for conservation management.

Towers are projecting a corporate image, more than anything else, pursued by developers and companies. A need for density, as has often been put forward, can also be achieved by other urban forms in a low-rise volume.
**East Rennell at a Crossroads**

The WHC and IUCN organized a joint mission to East Rennell, Solomon Islands (30 March – 5 April) to assess and report on the state of conservation of this property, examine its draft resource management plan and the draft National World Heritage Protection Bill, as well as document and assess the effectiveness of the customary protection of the property.

The property, located on the south-eastern part of Rennell Island, is a stepping stone in the migration and evolution of species in the western Pacific, and an important site for the science of island biogeography, as well as a natural laboratory for scientific study. It is among those World Heritage sites that are under customary ownership and subject to sustainable resource issues.

Following the outbreak of civil unrest in the Solomon Islands in June 2000, World Heritage management virtually came to a standstill. The government became essentially dysfunctional and World Heritage was dropped from the agenda. Though the country is now slowly returning to normality, government administration has been badly affected and a much diminished capacity relies heavily upon external funding and support.

What are your views on the Special Experts Meeting on the concept of outstanding universal value, held in Kazan, Russian Federation in April?

The Kazan meeting tried to define the rules of the game. What is outstanding universal value? Who defines it? What elements should be taken into consideration? All regions were represented. There was a genuine interest and openness shown at the meeting, whose report will be presented to the 29th session of the Committee for further consideration. The 29th session of the Committee will be the first ever to be held in Sub-Saharan Africa. What comments does that inspire?

Although the country is now slowly returning to normality, government administration has been badly affected and a much diminished capacity relies heavily upon external funding and support. Whatever the messages conveyed at the time of inscription in 1998, the people of East Rennell were firmly of the opinion that attaining World Heritage status would result in immediate material benefits to the local community and increased wealth. This view was encouraged by the commencement, immediately after inscription, of a substantial project funded by a regional donor to develop tourism and other small sustainable business enterprises. Unfortunately, these projects were suspended a year-and-a-half later due to the civil unrest.

This mission has been a catalyst for re-establishing contact and communication between the WHC and the State Party, which had lapsed over a period of some seven years since the site was inscribed on the World Heritage List. Despite the difficulties of the past, the resilience of the local people and their desire for progress, together with a return to stable government, provide an opportunity for re-establishing an effective collaborative partnership between the Solomon Islands and the WHC and to build on the promising start made seven years ago.
At the request of the World Heritage Committee at its 28th session, a ‘Special Expert Meeting of the World Heritage Convention: the Concept of Outstanding Universal Value’ was held in Kazan, Tatarstan, Russian Federation (6-10 April), attended by some thirty experts from around the world and representatives from the Advisory Bodies and the World Heritage Centre. The Mayor of Kazan, Kamil Ishkhakov, as well as Yuri Fedotov, Vice-Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, spoke on the opening day of the meeting.

The World Heritage Committee requested the meeting, following increasing concern that outstanding universal value may be interpreted and applied differently in different regions and by different stakeholders.

The working groups first discussed ‘Understanding the concept of outstanding universal value under the World Heritage Convention’.

Three main themes were then considered in smaller groups. One group dealt with ways to better identify properties of potential outstanding universal value and the preparation of Tentative Lists. This group discussed how the process of preparing the Tentative List is handled in different regions and who is involved in it.

Another group considered how nominations of properties of potential outstanding universal value could be improved. They discussed not only what action needs to be taken to improve nominations, but also what the difficulties are in determining and demonstrating outstanding universal value.

A third group examined the sustainable conservation of World Heritage properties and what ideal management requirements in different regions are, in order to maintain the integrity and authenticity of the different categories of World Heritage properties.

The World Heritage Centre’s Nature Section organized the Second World Heritage Forests Meeting (9-11 March) at the National School of Forestry in Nancy, France. Forty representatives of the major conventions, donors, non-governmental organizations and training institutions worldwide, along with conservation professionals working at the site level, attended.

This meeting recommended that supporting ecosystems in the landscape beyond the boundaries of World Heritage forest sites must be considered for new and existing sites. It also called on the WHC to work closely with the Convention on Biological Diversity’s Secretariat to implement the programme of work on protected areas following the ecosystem approach.

Participants noted that the work of the UNESCO Ecological and Earth Sciences Division and the evolving World Heritage forest strategy have significant additional sponsorship and promoting the World Heritage Convention as a tool for global forest and biodiversity conservation.

Partly as a result of this meeting, tropical forest areas in ‘biodev-ersity hotspots’ are now generally well represented on the World Heritage List. The focus should now be on consolidating the conservation gains in these sites, and supporting management effectiveness so that their protection can be better assured, according to the recent IUCN analysis of natural site gaps.

The World Heritage List currently includes approximately 17% of the global forest area under protected status. Eighty-seven World Heritage sites include significant forest cover, totalling around seventy million hectares of protected forest (20% greater than the surface area of France). The WHC is involved with the management of projects supporting forest conservation in twenty-one of these sites and in an additional four potential World Heritage sites around the globe, with a total budget of more than US$25 million.

Considering these statistics it is apparent that the World Heritage Centre, alone or in partnership, has a significant role to play in the conservation of the world’s forests, but to be most effective the actions of the various groups must be coordinated.

The World Heritage Centre is now working towards building the necessary partnerships to ensure the Convention fulfills its potential as a tool for global forest and biodiversity conservation.

World Heritage Centre: Nature Section

The Second International World Heritage Forests Meeting

The Second International World Heritage Forests Meeting took place in Rome (10-11 May) to examine proposals on the next steps for the rehabilitation of Bam and its cultural landscape, ‘Bam and its Cultural Landscape’ was inscribed on both the World Heritage List and the List of World Heritage in Danger after the devastating earthquake on 26 December 2003 that overwhelmed the site and killed an estimated 30,000-40,000 people and left 75,000 homeless. The site has an extraordinary cultural significance in that it represents an outstanding example of the interaction of man and nature in a desert environment. Its defining characteristics include the remains of the earthen citadel and fortified settlement at its centre (known as ‘Arg-e-Bam), and an agricultural area irrigated by a complex system of underground channels called qanats, dating sometimes from the Achaemenid period and still in use today.

The World Heritage Centre, in cooperation with the Italian and Iranian authorities and with the participation of numerous international experts and institutions, organized a technical meeting in Rome (10-11 May) to examine proposals on the next steps for the rehabilitation of Bam and its cultural landscape. Representatives of ICROM, ICOMOS and ICARDA also attended.

Since the earthquake, and under the umbrella of UNESCO, Iranian officials and international experts have worked together with the local community for the rehabilitation of the cultural heritage of Bam. However, the scale of the problems, especially in relation to the humanitarian needs of the population, and the complexity of the conservation issues posed by the site, have so far prevented major progress.

The Rome meeting, funded by the Italian Government, was therefore organized to both stimulate reflection on the most appropriate approach to the rehabilitation of the cultural heritage, and to mobilize further support and renewed cooperation between Iranian and international partners. The discussion, involving experts from a wide spectrum of disciplines, covered a number of topics, including the need to better define the values of the World Heritage property to guide the elaboration of a clear vision for its future use. Options were also considered for the prospect of maintaining the property strictly as an archaeological site, or committing to partial or total restoration. Several pilot projects were presented and discussed. The meeting helped clarify the nature and complexity of the questions related to the recovery of Bam and its Cultural Landscape, preparing the ground for future work on the site.

The Aksum Obelisk returned to Ethiopia in April

Major archaeological vestiges have been discovered at the World Heritage site of Aksum, Ethiopia, by the experts UNESCO sent to survey the World Heritage site and for the elevation of the Aksum Obelisk at its original location. The last segment of the 160-tonne 24.6-metre high stele has arrived in Aksum. It had been in Rome since 1937.

T he archaeological discovery, according to the experts, is the site of a royal necropolis used by several dynasties before the Christian era. It stretches beyond the perimeter of the present archaeological site at the foot of Mount Saint George and Mount Mariam.

Underground chambers and arcades have been found in the vicinity of the original location of the obelisk, declared Elizabeth Wangari, Chief of WHC Africa Unit. ‘Geo-radar and electrotomographic prospection – the most advanced technologies for underground observation – revealed the existence of several vast funerary chambers under the site’s parking ground which was built in 1963,’ said Jen Williams, of UNESCO’s Culture Sector, who, along with Ms. Wangari, took part in the mission.

The team of UNESCO experts, headed by archaeologist Rodolfo Fatichichi, an expert on Aksum at the Institute Universitario Orientale of Naples, Italy, conducted a ‘non-invasive archaeological prospection’ of the site. The data collected through geo-radar and electrotomographic prospection are being processed at a laboratory at La Sapienza University in Rome and will be used to create 3D models of the royal tombs. The processed data will be communicated to the Governments of Ethiopia and Italy.

Last November, the Governments of Ethiopia and Italy signed a bilateral agreement on the return of the Aksum Obelisk, in keeping with the World Heritage Convention, and asked for UNESCO’s cooperation in implementing the return.

Archaeological Discoveries at Aksum

Bam and its Cultural Landscape, Iran

Archaeological Discoveries at Aksum

Outstanding Universal Value: the Kazan Meeting

Four themes were then considered in smaller groups. One group dealt with ways to better identify properties of potential outstanding universal value and the preparation of Tentative Lists. This group discussed how the process of preparing the Tentative List is handled in different regions and who is involved in it.

Another group considered how nominations of properties of potential outstanding universal value could be improved. They discussed not only what action needs to be taken to improve nominations, but also what the difficulties are in determining and demonstrating outstanding universal value.

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An International Conference ‘Safeguarding and Cultural Heritage: The Role of Sacred Natural Sites and Cultural Landscapes’ was held in Durban, South Africa, from 22 to 24 June. The Conference was organized by the WHC and the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) with the support of the United Nations University, Tokyo (30 May - 2 June). The Conference was aimed at addressing the interrelationship of biological and cultural diversity of our planet, nature conservation remains and indigenous and local communities presented case studies on sacred natural sites and cultural landscapes. The Symposium also reviewed linkages between nature and culture interactions which assist protected-area managers and decision-makers.

At the Heads of State from South-East Europe in Varna, Bulgaria (20-21 May), the Varna Declaration was adopted in order to promote cultural heritage and cultural landscapes in the region. The Declaration was prepared by the Bulgarian President, Georgi Parvanov, the Director-General of UNESCO, Koichi Motsumura, and Terry Davis, Secretary-General of the Council of Europe. The Varna Declaration pledges to take urgent measures to protect cultural heritage in danger in the region, and take action to stop the illicit traffic of cultural goods.

The ‘Days of Mauritanian World Heritage Cities’, held at UNESCO Headquarters (11-14 April), celebrated the cultural heritage of Mauritania and its ancient cities. The event was organized by the WHC, the Mauritanian Government’s Cultural Heritage Project Unit and the World Bank, in co-operation with the Permanent Delegation of Mauritania to UNESCO and with the support of France. On 11 April, the President of Mauritania, Maaouya Ould Sid Ahmed Taya, the Director-General of UNESCO, Koichi Motsumura, and World Bank Vice President for Europe, Jean-François Rischard, opened the event and the exhibition ‘Cities of Remembrance – Ancient Ksar of Mauritania’, which traveled on to the Adrar Museum at Atar, Mauritania.

What Are They Doing?

- Francesco Bandarin, WHC Director, was in Ecuador (10-17 April), to attend the Fifth Expert Meeting on the process of nomination of the Qhapaq Ñan (main) Road, and to visit the Galapagos to learn about conservation challenges there. He was accompanied by Nuria Sanz, Programme Specialist, Latin America and Caribbean Unit, responsible for the Qhapaq Ñan program plan, and Marc Patry, Programme Specialist, Nature Section. Mr Bandarin also went to Rome (May 10-11) to attend the International Conference on World Heritage and Contemporary Architecture. Mr. Sanz attended a meeting in Lima (18 April) called by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Peru on the state of conservation of Machu Picchu to discuss the Vilcanota Project proposed by the Qhapaq Ñan Cultural Heritage Project.

- Marielle Richon, Focal Point for the Forum UNESCO – IFLA, participated in the International Training Workshop ‘Education Kit in Swahili Language’, organized by the UNESCO Dar es Salaam and Nairobi Offices and the WHC, was held at the Centre for Research and Oral Tradition and African National Languages (EACROTANAL) in Zanzibar, Tanzania (14-16 March). The workshop was convened to familiarize teachers from eight countries in the sub-region (DR, Uganda, Tanzania, Zambia, Zimbabwe, Comoros, Rwanda and Kenya) with the Educational Kit and to develop knowledge and awareness about World Heritage. Experiences were exchanged about working with students on the subject of World Heritage, and possibilities explored for introducing the Kit into schools. Ms Richon was invited by the WHC to participate in an expert meeting of the National Commission of Zambia on 22 to 23 June.

- Guy Dabobnet, Programme Specialist, Nature Section, was in Kinshasa, DRC (16-February) to attend a meeting on the Information Management System for the ICCN. Mr Dabobnet also attended the World Heritage Follow-up Meeting in France, Nancy (9-11 March), organized by Mr Patry and Steven Ripley, Consultant, Nature Section. Ron van Oers, Adviser for World Heritage Cities,provided assistance to the WHC and the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), in implementing the Co-operation between WHC and OECD

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