

INTEGRATED IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGY

Towards elaboration of a thematic paper proposing to the States Parties to the *World Heritage Convention* general guidance regarding management of cultural and natural heritage of religious interest

This document developed jointly by the Steering Group on Heritage of Religious Interest, established by the World Heritage Centre and the Advisory Bodies ICOMOS, ICCROM, IUCN, proposes an integrated implementation strategy towards elaboration of a thematic paper proposing to the States Parties general guidance regarding management of cultural and natural heritage of religious interest, as requested by the World Heritage Committee.

It outlines the main objectives, identifies main expertise needs, defines target audiences, lists its guiding principles and expected results (outcomes), as well as suggests a number of core activities to be carried out within the three phases of the general guidelines development.

I. BACKGROUND

UNESCO is the only specialized UN agency entrusted with the mandate to build the defenses of peace in the minds of men and women. In this unique capacity, it can undertake and stimulate a broad-based dialogue on sensitive issues, respond to a range of global challenges international community faces and contribute to reconciliation and peace, through capacity building, the development of appropriate policies, tools and operational and inclusive modalities, while involving a wide range of partners.

This is demonstrated by a lead role and achievements in the development and promotion of a powerful normative action related to the protection of cultural and natural heritage in all its forms. A case on this point is the initiative on heritage of religious interest which serves the objectives of the World Heritage Convention towards elaboration of a thematic paper proposing to the States Parties general guidance regarding management of cultural and natural heritage of religious interest, especially in a period in which such heritage is severely threatened with targeted destruction.

One of the main challenges for the States Parties to the World Heritage Convention is to ensure, at the national level, the effective identification protection and management of heritage and giving it a role and function for communities and insure the safeguard of the Outstanding Universal Value of properties inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List – guaranteeing its transmission to the future generations.

The issue of the protection and management of properties of religious interest is increasingly prominent in contemporary conservation debates. All of the properties associated with religion and traditional beliefs constitute to this day one of the largest thematic categories on the World Heritage List and it's often also the case at a national scale.

It was noted that these World Heritage properties - especially living religious and sacred sites - require specific policies for protection and management that take into account their distinct spiritual nature as a key factor in their conservation and that such policies cannot be sustainable without in-depth consultation with the appropriate stakeholders.

Research, studies and analyses of religious heritage and sacred sites have been carried out by the Advisory Bodies - ICCROM, ICOMOS and IUCN. There were a number of conclusions and recommendations drawn from previous meetings and activities on religious and sacred heritage, such as the 2005 ICOMOS General Assembly resolution calling for the "establishment of an International Thematic Programme for Religious Heritage", the 2011 ICOMOS General Assembly Resolution on Protection and enhancement of sacred heritage sites, buildings and landscapes, as well as the 2008 UNESCO/IUCN/ Guidelines for Protected Area Managers of Sacred Natural Sites.

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In 2004, at its 28th session, the World Heritage Committee took note of the results of the ICOMOS analysis of the World Heritage List and Tentative Lists which includes also an analysis of the religious properties included on these Lists.

In 2005, the ICCROM Forum on Living Religious Heritage concluded that understanding heritage of religious interest requires recognizing that the intangible significance of tangible religious objects, structures and places is the key to their meaning. It also requires sensitivity to the overall cultural-historical context to properly appreciate the spirit of a place and its symbolic significance, beyond its material existence. As an extension to this, ICCROM organised a Forum on Asian Buddhist Heritage - Conserving the Sacred in December 2013 in Seoul, Korea with the financial support of the Cultural Heritage Administration of Korea of which publication with papers and conclusions will be completed by mid-2015.

Within the context of the International Year for the Rapprochement of Cultures 2010, proclaimed by the United Nations General Assembly, an international seminar on the role of religious communities in the management of World Heritage properties was held in Kiev (Ukraine) in November 2010. For the first time in the history of the World Heritage Convention, the issue regarding the protection of religious and sacred heritage and the involvement of religious communities in its management was discussed at the international level, involving active participation of the religious authorities.

In its Decision **35 COM 5A**, paragraph 7, the World Heritage Committee took note of the recommendations of the International Seminar on the Role of Religious Communities in the Management of World Heritage properties, organized in Kiev (Ukraine), in November 2010 and requested the World Heritage Centre, in collaboration with the Advisory Bodies, *to elaborate a thematic paper proposing to States Parties general guidance regarding the management of their cultural and natural heritage of religious interest, and in compliance with the national specificities, inviting States Parties to provide voluntary contributions to this end.*

The World Heritage Centre requested the States Parties by a Circular Letter of 22 December 2011 to support this activity and the associated research by providing voluntary contributions, as well as by organizing meetings, conferences and seminars within its framework.

In its Decision **36 COM 5A.1**, paragraph 6, the World Heritage Committee took note of the consultations between the World Heritage Centre and the Advisory Bodies towards the elaboration of a thematic paper proposing to the States Parties general guidance regarding the management of their cultural and natural heritage of religious interest, as well as of the establishment of a steering group in charge of coordinating the elaboration of this thematic paper and invites States Parties to support this initiative.

In its Decision **36 COM 13.I**, paragraph 5, the World Heritage Committee noted the need for thematic studies on certain types of sites with associative values, such as sacred sites.

In its Decision **37 COM 5A**, paragraph 4 and 5, the World Heritage Committee noted the consultations between the World Heritage Centre and the Advisory Bodies towards the elaboration of a thematic paper proposing to States Parties general guidance regarding the management of their cultural and natural heritage of religious interest, and the progress report on this activity, as well as it took note of the establishment of a steering group in charge of coordinating the elaboration of this thematic paper and invites States Parties to support this initiative.

UNESCO, by launching the Initiative on heritage of religious interest further to these World Heritage Committee decisions, plays a leading role in the development, in close collaboration with the Advisory Bodies, of the thematic paper proposing to State Parties general guidance regarding the management of cultural and natural heritage of religious interest. In the long-term, this initiative is intended to help integrate a number of guiding principles into cultural policies at the local, national, regional and international levels so as to contribute to the rapprochement of cultures and harmonious relations among peoples.

The establishment of a constructive dialogue with all stakeholders concerned is essential for developing general guidance on the management of heritage of religious interest.

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II. OBJECTIVE

Overall objective is to elaborate a thematic paper proposing to the States Parties general guidance regarding management of cultural and natural heritage of religious interest, as requested by the World Heritage Committee.

III. TARGET BENEFICIARIES / STAKEHOLDERS

- Responsible authorities: International, national, regional and local civil and religious authorities with responsibility for World Natural and Cultural Heritage of religious interest, custodians, World Heritage site managers, and other stakeholders concerned;
- Communities: local, religious communities and councils of traditional authorities, concerned with or holding custodianship for world natural and cultural heritage of religious interest;
- Subnational, national and international agencies dealing with the wider field of protection, conservation and management of world natural and cultural interest of religious interest.
- National and International agencies and institutions and bodies involved in development project design and implementation.

IV. EXPERTISE NEEDED

- Knowledge of forms of cultural heritage of religious interest (tangible and intangible) especially as related to maintenance and restoration modalities, as well as of forms of sacred natural heritage;
- Knowledge of associated sacred value of natural and cultural heritage of religious interest and other related intangible heritage dimensions;
- Familiarity with indigenous and traditional peoples' cosmologies through their acknowledged representatives;
- Communication skills, in particular in the domain of intercultural, intra- and interreligious/interfaith dialogue and cooperation;
- Principles of community participation and stakeholder involvement, in particular among communities with traditional and/or customary custodianship for natural and cultural heritage of religious interest;
- Principles of Conservation and Management of natural and cultural heritage, including cultural landscapes and historic urban landscapes;
- Knowledge of World Heritage Capacity-building strategy.

V. ELABORATION OF GENERAL GUIDANCE - GUIDING PRINCIPLES

Sustainable management and use of properties of religious interest could be supported, in particular:

- by acknowledging that the religious, spiritual and ritual use in the context of prayer, worship and remembrance distinguishes heritage of religious interest from other types of heritage;
- by adopting a more integrated approach to the conservation of the heritage and by strengthening the spiritual-cultural-natural links in the management of the sites;
- by respecting the fact that in many spiritual traditions the built environment and/or natural heritage is composed of multi-dimensional layers and values, whether human-made or natural;
- by recognising that some spiritual traditions will have sites and management processes that require secrecy and access control and that such a need is to be respected and supported;
- by reaffirming that culture has national, regional as well as local particularities within various natural, historical, cultural and religious backgrounds and that these may only be fully comprehensible within their specific local contexts;
- by giving priority to the particular communities for which such heritage was created and by taking into consideration the fact that certain traditional knowledge systems attached to the heritage exist and may be relevant for conservation and management of the site;

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- by recognising that values and traditions attached to heritage of religious interest as well as use requirements may contradict the views and standard working practices of the conservation community; thus, requiring understanding and adaptation;
- by considering religious communities as key partners in site management and in the creation of new approaches to joint management strategies.

VI. STRUCTURE

This long-term Initiative will be implemented in the following three broad phases:

- **Phase I “Preparatory activities” (ongoing)**
 - Designate of Steering Group on Heritage of Religious Interest in charge to coordinate the elaboration of this thematic paper (established – Decision 36 COM 5A.1);
 - Create a network of partners, including renown researchers and experts who seek views of spiritual traditions from elders and indigenous traditions, custodians, religious authorities, local spiritual communities and other relevant stakeholders that retain a close association with world natural and cultural heritage of religious interest;
 - Elaborate a concept for capacity-building activities for the representatives of religious communities and site managers in charge of WHP of religious interest (tested in 2013);
 - Develop a research methodology and programme, including data collection, case study analysis and survey activities (ongoing);
 - Organise thematic (national/regional) consultation workshops (draft concept attached);
- **Phase II “Research, global thematic survey and data analysis”:**
 - Collect and analyse data (ongoing);
 - Carry out stakeholders consultation using questionnaires, taking into account secrecy requirements;
 - Identify case study properties for in-depths research on a national, regional, global and trans-boundary basis, and consult the relevant national authorities and related religious or indigenous communities;
 - Define preliminary scope and content of the thematic paper and clarify key terminologies used;
- **Phase III “Consultation/production of thematic paper”**
 - Draft the text of the general guidance;
 - Consult with key stakeholders and Committee’s members;
 - Collate and analyze responses to the consultation draft and incorporate them into the general guidance;
 - Select a sample of representative case studies - testing of general guidance;
 - Review and analyse results;
 - Conclusions: adjustments to be included
 - Complete general guidance;
 - Establish a network on sharing experiences and implementation of general guidance;
 - Prepare the thematic paper to the attention of the World Heritage Committee, in compliance with its decision.

VII. MANAGEMENT

In conformity with the World Heritage Committee Decision 36 COM 5A.1, the Initiative is managed by the Steering Group on Heritage of Religious Heritage composed of officially designated World Heritage Centre and the Advisory Bodies representatives. The main international and regional institutions having the professional competency to contribute to the activities’ implementation will be also involved.

The World Heritage Centre ensures the overall coordination of the Initiative as well as its adherence to the Strategic Objectives. It will regularly report to the World Heritage Committee on progress made.

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The possible creation of the ICOMOS International Scientific Committee on Religious Heritage is in progress. ICCROM will advise on training activities and develop training materials and relevant modules within the framework of its Programme on Promoting People Centered Approach to Conservation: Living Heritage.

VIII. PROJECT PROPOSALS

The Steering Group is focusing on capacity-building activities and a case-study approach to identify the main challenges in the management of World Heritage cultural and natural properties of religious interest, as well as to collect inputs and relevant information necessary for the thematic paper and the thematic study.

The Steering Group has developed a research programme (see **Annex 1**), including data collection, case study analysis and survey activities (see “database project” in **Annex 2**), as well as a module for regional thematic consultations (see **Annex 3**).

Moreover, a module for Capacity-Building workshops for the representatives of religious communities and site managers in charge of WHP of religious interest was developed by ICCROM in coordination with the World Heritage Centre and ICOMOS (see **Annex 4**). This concept was tested in the Russian Federation and Greece - examples are available at <http://whc.unesco.org/document/123425> and <http://whc.unesco.org/document/124116>.

The States Parties are invited to provide their financial support for the following activities:

1. Finalisation and editing of a database of properties of religious interest;
2. Organization of a consultation meeting of partners for the fine-tuning of the strategy and activities – Meetings of the Steering Group;
3. Organization of regional thematic consultation workshops;
4. Organization of capacity-building workshops for the representatives of religious communities and site managers in charge of WHP of religious interest;
5. ICOMOS Thematic study on sites with associative values, such as sacred sites, requested by the World Heritage Committee (Decision 36 COM 13.I, paragraph 5)

IX. FINANCIAL SUPPORT REQUESTED FROM THE STATES PARTIES

Estimated budget by activity (in USD)¹:

<i>World Heritage Initiative on Heritage of Religious Interest</i>	<i>Budget (US\$)</i>
1. General support to the World Heritage Centre for the coordination of the elaboration of the thematic paper	40,000 per year
2. World Heritage Centre/Advisory Bodies consultative assistance and participation in the Capacity Building Workshops for the representatives of religious communities and site managers in charge of WHP of religious interest organized, using the existing module, by the States Parties	30,000 per workshop
3. Organization by the World Heritage Centre of regional thematic consultation workshops, in consultation with the Advisory Bodies	50,000 per workshop
4. Steering Group working meetings	30,000 par biennium
5. ICOMOS Thematic study on sacred sites	20,000 (preparatory phase)
6. Finalisation and editing of a database	50,000

¹ The States Parties and international partners wishing to provide voluntary contributions to the activities accordingly to the budget proposed or, in general, to the Initiative on Heritage of Religious Interest, are invited to transmit to the World Heritage Centre their letters of intention specifying the activity for which the support will be provided.