

**Experts Thematic Consultation Meeting on sustainable management of  
the World Heritage properties of religious interest  
Focus on South-Eastern and Mediterranean Europe  
UNESCO HQ Paris (16-18 February)**

**CONCEPT NOTE**<sup>1</sup>

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*.

For the first time in the history of the *World Heritage Convention*, the issue regarding the protection of heritage of religious interest has been discussed at the international level, involving active participation of the representatives of religious communities, during the International Seminar on the role of religious communities in the management of World Heritage properties (Kiev, Ukraine, 2010).

World Heritage properties such as living religious and sacred sites, constitute to this day the largest thematic category on the World Heritage List, and require specific policies for protection and management that take in account their distinct associated sacred or spiritual value as a key factor for their conservation.

It is in this spirit that the World Heritage Committee, during its 35th session (Decision 35 COM 5A, UNESCO, 2011) requested the World Heritage Centre, in collaboration with the Advisory Bodies, to elaborate a thematic paper proposing to State Parties general guidance regarding the management of their cultural and natural heritage of religious interest, and in compliance with the national specificities.

In conformity with the World Heritage Committee Decision 37 COM 5A, the Initiative on Heritage of religious interest is managed by the Steering Group in charge of coordinating the elaboration of the thematic paper composed of officially designated World Heritage Centre and the Advisory Bodies (ICOMOS, ICCROM, IUCN) representatives.

The establishment of a constructive dialogue with all stakeholders concerned is essential for developing general guidance on management of heritage of religious interest towards deeper understanding of associated sacred and spiritual values of World Heritage properties and their link with Outstanding Universal Value. Such meeting with international experts and religious communities can also provide crucial inputs in developing the most appropriate approaches in tackling challenging problems of heritage protection and generating understanding and mutual respect.

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<sup>1</sup> Prepared by the members of the Steering Group on Heritage of Religious Interest

In 2013, it was announced by the World Heritage Centre, that a ***cycle of Thematic Consultations***<sup>2</sup> should be launched world-wide, through a selected sample of representative case studies, for addressing sustainable management and use of properties of religious interest.

Following the thematic and regional activities and consultations, such as the International Seminar for religious representatives involved in the management and use of the World Heritage properties (Moscow, Russian Federation, 2013), the Multidisciplinary Workshop on the Strategic Framework for the Conservation and Management of the Mount Athos Cultural and Natural Heritage (Thessaloniki, Greece, 2013), ICCROM Forum on Asian Buddhist Heritage (Seoul, Korea, 2013), IUCN World Parks Congress (Sydney, Australia, 2014), the UNWTO Congress on Tourism and Pilgrimage (Santiago de Compostela, Spain, 2014) and the UNWTO Conference on Religious Heritage and Tourism (Elche, Spain, 2014), UNESCO decided to organize an ***Experts Thematic Consultation Meeting*** on sustainable management of the World Heritage properties of religious interest with focus on Mediterranean and South-Eastern Europe. This meeting could be seen as a model for future regional consultations in support UNESCO's work to implement the World Heritage Committee Decision on heritage of religious interest.

These consultations will, among others, be based on the results of the second cycle of the ***Periodic Reporting exercise*** and will take into account a number of conclusions and recommendations drawn from the state of conservation reports and previous international meetings and activities related to this subject.<sup>3</sup>

Moreover, the initiative and the cycle of its activities are implemented in close coordination with other World Heritage Programmes and initiatives<sup>4</sup>, and take into account the relevant United Nations General Assembly resolutions and documents, such as for example the ***Global Code of Ethics for Tourism***, endorsed by the United Nations General Assembly in 2001.<sup>5</sup>

## **Overall Objective**

The main objective of this Expert Meeting would be to contribute to the development, by the WHC/Advisory Bodies Steering Group on Heritage of Religious Interest, of the 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, as requested by the World Heritage Committee.

## **Expected output**

The main output of the meeting shall be **draft recommendations for development of general guidance regarding the management of the cultural and natural heritage of religious interest in compliance with the national specificities.**

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<sup>2</sup> Presentation by the World Heritage Centre at the Multidisciplinary Workshop on the Strategic Framework for the Conservation and Management of the Mount Athos Cultural and Natural Heritage, Thessaloniki, Greece, 29 – 30 August 2013; <http://whc.unesco.org/document/125311>

<sup>3</sup> - Nara Document on Authenticity adopted at the Nara Conference on Authenticity in relation to the World Heritage Convention held in 1994 ; Quebec Declaration on the Preservation of the Spirit of Place, adopted at the 16th General Assembly of ICOMOS in 2008; - ICCROM Forum on the conservation of Living Religious Heritage; - ICOMOS study "Filling the Gaps - an Action Plan for the Future"; - 2008 UNESCO MAB/IUCN Guidelines for the Conservation and Management of Sacred Natural Sites; - 2010 Kyiv Statement on the protection of religious properties within the framework of the World Heritage Convention; - 2011 ICOMOS General Assembly Resolution on Protection and enhancement of sacred heritage sites, buildings and landscapes.

<sup>4</sup> - World Heritage and Sustainable Tourism Programme; - Reducing Disasters Risks at World Heritage Properties; - World Heritage and Sustainable Development; - World Heritage Cities Programme; - World Heritage Forest Programme.

<sup>5</sup> Article 1 of the Global Code of Ethics for Tourism underlines that "the understanding and promotion of the ethical values common to humanity, with an attitude of tolerance and respect for the diversity of religious, philosophical and moral beliefs, are both the foundation and the consequence of responsible tourism"

## **Proposed thematic areas for discussions:**

1. Understanding heritage of religious interest
  - Discussion on mapping of World Heritage cultural and natural properties of religious interest and definition of thematic sub-categories;
  - Development of a preliminary cross-cutting contextual frame (“une grille de lecture”) as a necessary basis for the development of an outline of the *General Guidance*;
  - Discussion on definition of the key contextual issues related to heritage protection and factors affecting the World Heritage properties of religious interest;
  - Sharing experiences, information and perspectives in terms of efforts undertaken to balance the competing requirements of faith and conservation;
2. Assessing values
  - Discussion on the establishment of recommendations on how to link Outstanding Universal Value and associated sacred or spiritual values in the region
3. Conservation and management
  - Consolidation of knowledge on study, development and practical application of national and international normative instruments in terms of cooperation between state and religious communities for the preservation of World Heritage properties;
  - Discussion on World Heritage management requirements and their implications at property of religious interest levels including access for visitors, heritage specialists, pilgrims, prayers;
  - Discussion on current conservation and management regimes within the World Heritage properties of religious interest

## **Proposed Working Sessions**

The participants of the meeting will be invited to discuss the following issues during 3 Working Sessions and to develop recommendations to be adopted at the closing session of this consultation meeting.

### **Working Session 1: *Understanding World Heritage of religious interest***

- Mapping of World Heritage cultural and natural properties of religious interest and definition of thematic sub-categories;
- Key contextual issues related to heritage protection and factors affecting the World Heritage properties of religious interest;

### **Working Session 2: *Linking Outstanding Universal Value and associated sacred value***

- Managing World Heritage properties to sustain or enhance Outstanding Universal Value as well as other values to the community including responsibilities of all stakeholders.
- Coexistence of communities - Mutual Respect of values and Constructive Dialogue in a multicultural context
- *Spirit of place* - Contexts in which the management of the cultural and natural heritage of religious interest is practiced

### **Working Session 3: *Properties of Religious Interest – Sustainable Management: Identification of the main challenges in the governance, management, use and access with focus on Mediterranean and South-Eastern Europe***

- Current conservation and management regimes within the World Heritage properties of religious interest
- Conservation and management aspects related to specialists, prayers, pilgrims, visitors and local communities