

WORLD HERITAGE NOMINATION – IUCN TECHNICAL EVALUATION

COFFEE CULTURAL LANDSCAPE (COLOMBIA) – ID No. 1121

IUCN joined ICOMOS for the evaluation mission to this nominated cultural landscape. IUCN provides the following comments to ICOMOS based on the mission observations and a desk review.

- a) IUCN notes that the nomination document sets out a clear rationale for the consideration of the property's landscape as a "combined work of man and nature". The nomination highlights the importance of coffee cultivation as a very important economic activity for local communities. IUCN notes that there are other similar natural landscapes in the region, and in other settings worldwide, which also demonstrate this type of relationship. Furthermore, the nomination document underlines the cultural, social and natural aspects that make this landscape unique.
- b) The natural values of the landscape have been changed and little is left of the original vegetation across most of the area. The last remnant natural forest, including bamboo forest, protects biodiversity while conserving upper watersheds and riverbanks. An important effort has been carried out in the Quindío Department to restore natural forest creating biological corridors among protected areas, which retain natural values within the landscape including ecosystem services. An important collection of flora, located in the Quindío Botanical Garden, comprises most of the threatened plant and trees – including palms – species as well as others with social and economic value for local stakeholders. The National Center for Bamboo Studies (Centro Nacional para el Estudio del Bambú-Guadua) Center, also in the Quindío Department, holds an important collection of native bamboo species.
- c) It is noted that shade grown coffee is the traditional system and supports significantly higher levels of biodiversity. IUCN questions, therefore, why plantations with open grown coffee are included in the nomination. It is further noted that climate change is a threat to the values of the landscape and mitigation and adaptation measures should be important components of site management.
- d) The rationale used to define the nominated property boundaries is based mainly on cultural and coffee production attributes. The proposed boundaries, in most parts of the nominated property do not consider natural attributes as protected areas, upper watersheds and remnant natural forest. There is an active series of national and local protected areas within the region and in its boundaries holding a rich biodiversity, specially related with birds. IUCN considers that an integrated management system, including the local environmental authorities (Corporaciones Regionales Autónomas), would be required to ensure that there is an effective overall approach to the management of the property natural assets. Protection of the natural values of the property should be a central objective in the management system for the property.
- e) The basis for protection of some of the area natural values is customary law and governance integrates customary and formal protection and management in a complementary and consistent fashion is a way to address it. Local inhabitants seem to be well prepared to participate effectively in governance and decision making regarding their natural landscape conservation.
- f) Different agro forestry systems that combine coffee production with shade species –including plantain – and soil management and conservation techniques were seen within the landscape. The coffee production process is been adapted to use a minimal water quantity and water treatment systems are placed in most farms. Several certifications schemes are used, including seven "sustainable coffee labels", which require that the coffee is cultivated without the use of chemicals or emphasize social aspects or a combination of both. An emphasis is put in the production of special coffees which integrates the environmental conservation, economic equity and social responsibility concepts. Most coffee production areas have hedges as boundaries. IUCN notes the positive trend in terms of conservation of coffee production.
- g) Mining, which was an important economic activity in the past centuries, was mentioned as a new threat to the landscape. No official information is available on this and it is recommended ICOMOS investigate this issue further.