



Technical Meeting on the Recovery of the World Heritage Site of Palmyra

18 December 2019

Introduction

The “Technical Meeting on the Recovery of the World Heritage Site of Palmyra” took place on 18 December 2019 at UNESCO’s Headquarters, with the aim of reflecting on, and discussing the recovery of Palmyra as a World Heritage property. It aimed at contributing to the implementation of the latest World Heritage Committee Decisions (40 COM 7A.21, 41 COM 7A.49, 42 COM 7A.35 and 43 COM 7A.36), which requested limiting restoration works to first aid interventions until the security situation has improved, therefore allowing for detailed studies and extensive fieldwork, as well as discussions on defining optimal approaches.

The meeting was attended by 34 multidisciplinary group of experts from France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Poland, Sri Lanka, Syrian Arab Republic, Switzerland, Russian Federation and United Kingdom, as well as ICOMOS, ICCROM, ARC-WH, the UNESCO Beirut Office, the World Heritage Centre and the Entity on Culture and Emergencies. It built on the recommendations of the UNESCO rapid assessment mission (April, 2016), and was in line with the recommendations of the Technical Assistance Workshop for the World Heritage Site of Palmyra (December 2016), which specified that future plans for the property are to be prepared in close consultation with the international scientific community.

The meeting focused on the recovery of the Site of Palmyra, as a World Heritage property, as well as related issues such as reconstruction, where number of other case studies were presented. It considered the application of international charters and recommendations, including the Warsaw Recommendation on Recovery and Reconstruction of Cultural Heritage (May, 2018), with a focus on the preservation of the Outstanding Universal Value (OUV) of the Site of Palmyra. The meeting also provided an opportunity to take stock of the results of the International Conference on Palmyra that took place on 16 and 17 December 2019, organized by the Institute of Archaeology and Ancient History of the University of Lausanne (Switzerland).

Results and Recommendations

At the end of the meeting, a number of preliminary recommendations were agreed upon as follows:

1. Immediate Actions

- Ensuring the security of the site as a whole, and, assessing the current security conditions and accessibility to the property.
- Conducting a detailed documentation study of the current situation of the site and of all its individual monumental structures.
- Estimation and evaluation of the effective structural damage of stones, elements and monumental structures and their residual strength and stability.
- Implementing emergency interventions at specific monuments, such as at the Citadel, the Temple of Ba’al and the Triumphal Arch, in line with the recommendations of the Technical Assistance Workshop for the World Heritage Site of Palmyra (December 2016).

- Consider the feasibility of elaborating the Desired State of Conservation for the property, with the necessary corrective measures and a timeframe for their implementation for the eventual removal of Palmyra from the List of World Heritage in Danger.

2. Reconstruction

- No reconstruction work is to be carried out in the immediate phase; the feasibility of any restoration/reconstruction would need to be undertaken following a detailed assessment of damages to monumental structures and their destroyed elements individually, as well as the site as a whole.
- A further discussion and reflection on any restoration/reconstruction will be considered holistically, by integrating the Outstanding Universal Value with all other site values that are important to the community, and taking into consideration international standards.

3. Movable Heritage and the Illicit Traffic of Cultural Property

- Restoration of museum artefacts and objects that were vandalized and intentionally damaged.
- Enhancing international cooperation for the update of inventories related to looted objects, with the support of UNESCO and ICOM.

4. Museum

- The rehabilitation of the museum in Palmyra is a priority and would be very symbolic as it would give a positive sign that may encourage the return of populations. Proper rehabilitation would also consider specific retrofitting to improve previous structural performances through a methodological approach, coherent with current international scientific standards for buildings affected by extreme events.
- The rehabilitation of the museum would take into consideration a holistic approach that integrates the interpretation of the OUV and all values associated with the site, including those connected with traumatic events.
- In parallel with museum rehabilitation/retrofitting, a pilot case study/application of scientific shoring of one damaged monument is to be planned.

5. Modern Technologies and Digitized Inventories

- The detailed technical suggestions that resulted from the International Conference on Palmyra (Lausanne, 16-17 December 2019) are welcomed, including the suggested mechanisms to promote open data sources for the collection, safe storage and sharing of information related to surveys and documentation.
- The proposal for the development of a map of the site, including all information and documents available on specific monuments and areas would be highly beneficial. This map could then be shared on all relevant websites, including UNESCO's website.
- New materials in museum rehabilitation/retrofitting and monument conservation/reconstruction are to be considered for their high potentialities.

6. Local Community

- The return of all local communities, and their values associated with the site, would be essential for future planning. A consultation process would need to be conducted in a planning process that integrates a people-centred approach.
- Decisions on the inclusion of the memory resulting from recent traumatic events in the interpretation of the site should be linked with the needs, aspirations and desires of the community.

- Research on intangible practices connected to the site and its elements is encouraged, such as the promotion of traditional handicrafts for livelihoods, including for the refugee community, as a vehicle that contributes to the wellbeing of the community.
- Conducting capacity building activities and implementing projects through a participatory approach – including those related to the museum, pilot case study in structural stabilization, and others.

7. International Cooperation and Technical Expertise

- The establishment of an international coordination mechanism is necessary, which could be under the umbrella of UNESCO, with a scientific multidisciplinary team for initiating in-situ actions.
- Collection and sharing of available data and documentation are needed for any scientific studies on restoration and reconstruction, and to avoid overlaps.
- Technical expertise for specific technical conservation problems is required and would be covered by the scientific multidisciplinary team.

8. Planning

- An integrated conservation Management Plan is of utmost priority, which would need to be carried out through a comprehensive participatory value-based approach, also taking into consideration the state of the oasis.
- Integrated territorial planning would also need to be carried out in relation to the neighbouring city of Tadmur.
- A specific plan with a chronological timeline for conservation work, including structural stabilization and restoration, within a holistic vision for recovery.