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CONVENTION CONCERNING THE PROTECTION OF THE  
WORLD CULTURAL AND NATURAL HERITAGE

WORLD HERITAGE COMMITTEE  
Seventh ordinary session  
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Speech by Mr. Michel PARENT, Chairman of ICOMOS, during the Seventh Session of the Bureau of the World Heritage Committee (Paris, 27-30 June 1983).

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Mr Chairman,

When this Bureau and, at the end of the year, the World Heritage Committee (WHC) have considered current nominations, there will be over 150 Cultural Properties on its list - almost two-thirds of the properties included since the implementation of the Convention as a whole.

ICOMOS has given its opinion, and a statement of its reasons, after each of these dossiers has been studied by our co-ordinator Mr PRESSOUYRE, considered by our Bureau, and, very often, examined again after consultation with the state concerned in close liaison with Unesco.

Generally speaking, your Bureau and your Committee have accepted the circumstantiated opinions offered by ICOMOS. I feel I must acknowledge this at the outset, and thank you for the confidence you continue to place in the organization, while showing a quite legitimate, and indeed indispensable concern to examine and discuss each proposal in depth, to evaluate our own references to the applicable criteria, and to concentrate on the actual present status of the property in question - in short a fundamental concern for the consistency of your decisions. Your latest recommendation to ICOMOS, in fact, is that "ICOMOS should try to further develop comparisons and also give more emphasis to the criteria of integrity" (Report of the sixth session of the Bureau, 21-24 June 1982)

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I will come back in a moment to these criteria, and especially to the concept of integrity. First of all, with reference to your expectations in the field of comparative evaluation, which is the guarantee of consistency in your decisions, and without which they would have neither objectivity nor scientific or moral foundation, in ICOMOS as well as in the Committee we have made every effort to acquire the proper means to carry out this comparative work - a point to which I shall return. Many difficulties in this area have yet to be overcome.

Furthermore, the considerable number of properties already included in the list form an ever richer body of precedent to which States can refer. Could not the constant recommendations of greater strictness in interpretation of the criteria nevertheless lead to a situation where something which would have been accepted yesterday, or whose equivalent was accepted yesterday, is refused inclusion in the list of property today ?

#### I. THE PRESENT NEED TO TAKE STOCK OF THE SITUATION AND TO RETHINK THE FUTURE

In view of the above general considerations I would be inclined to recommend that, at this stage, we set aside the necessary time and resources for a critical examination of the list as it stands and for reflection on the future that will lead to definite aims which go beyond abstract reference to a set of criteria and will eventually resolve the ambiguities observed at present.

It is a fact that the ever more numerous nominations give rise to contradictory evaluations, and we find ourselves involved at present with a great number of nominations where those "above the threshold" are so close to those "below the threshold" that the opinion adopted by a majority of a given body on one occasion could well be different on another occasion, with only a slight change in the body's composition. In view of this, ICOMOS intends to formulate suggestions, although most of them will not be finalized until after the studies we are about to suggest have been carried out. Things being as they are, it is ultimately up to the Committee to reassess its position on a number of basic questions, before accepting or rejecting without prior reference to these basic questions a particular cultural property nominated today by a given state.

#### II. STOCK-TAKING AND THINKING ABOUT THE FUTURE

##### a) Stock-taking

You will recall, Mr Chairman, since at that time both of us were already members of this body, that at the meeting in Luxor in 1979 I, in my capacity as rapporteur, presented an initial attempt at classification of the sixty or so "cultural" dossiers that were then being considered. With reference to the three broad categories listed in the Convention (monuments, groups of buildings and sites), it would be appropriate to develop this typology on the basis of the 150 properties nominated or already included. What is particularly striking is that, thanks to a broad interpretation of the definition of "site" or "group of buildings", large areas of towns, or even entire towns, have been

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included and that vast regions containing several towns (the Kathmandu Valley, for example) or containing hundreds of archaeological sites (such as the Nile Valley) have also been included. It could be said that the actual number of dossiers for inclusion is not necessarily significant; but an accumulation of dossiers of such different weights might seem reasonable only if it corresponded to the true nature of things, and not simply to the choices of states which deliberately use methods of selection that differ one from another. Among other conclusions the Committee could draw from: a comparative study of the particulars of properties on the list. This stock-taking could allow you to give a definite answer to the following question: in so far as there is a divergence between the consistency of the list as a whole and the choice of each state to apprehend its heritage according to its own methodology, which should take precedence? No useful decision on policy concerning series of properties can be adopted until this assessment of the ultimate purpose of the Convention has been decided.

b) The future

You will also recall, Mr Chairman, that on the basis of Article 11, paragraph 1 of the Convention both Mr Pawlowski, my predecessor as rapporteur, and myself had also proposed that each state, without any formal commitment, submit to the Committee a tentative list of the properties it would wish to have included. Even though it is limited to the dozen States that have submitted such lists, the information they provide has proved most useful to ICOMOS. They demonstrate a great variety of interpretations of the Convention. We recently got together with representatives of countries which have drawn up tentative lists and belong to the same cultural area - in this case Western Europe. All of them saw the need to coordinate their nominations of properties of similar nature, such as Gothic cathedrals, Romanesque abbeys and towns of artistic importance. At the suggestion of Portugal, furthermore, a new dimension in national nominations emerged, viz: the idea of seeking a significant dominant feature whereby that state and its cultural property came to play a specific role in world history - in the case of Portugal, the pioneering of the great seaways of the world.

Besides this collaboration with states, ICOMOS has consulted some of the world's leading specialists, in order to undertake preliminary thematic studies which should match the tentative lists of the various states.

All this work could gradually lead up to fixing a horizon for the preparation of the list of World Heritage Cultural Properties. It will allow us to delimit the field in which choices are to be made. If you so wish, the work could even lead up to the formulation of suggestions to States. This brings me to the second question I think it useful to put to the Committee: Is it not now time to officialize this policy of comparison?

It is certain that no one is in a position to make a comparative analysis putting each individual nomination in its global context. It is clear that such an analysis must exist in some form before any dossier is submitted, and that, this being the case, the Committee must have each country prepare its

tentative list: ICOMOS standing ready to assist in this task. We are particularly aware of the great disappointment that is felt when a state has carefully built up a dossier which the Committee then has to defer or reject for lack of means of comparison. Would it not be better if the need for consistency in the World Heritage List and in the strict application of the criteria were taken into account at an earlier stage, that of the tentative lists? In this way, once agreement on the general guidelines were agreed upon, States would have a better chance of having their individual dossiers endorsed, providing of course that they were properly drawn up and if the information they contain on the state of the property were conclusive.

### III. CRITERIA

I now turn to the application of the criteria. For a host of individual cases the doubts that arise concern mainly:

- 1) the authenticity of the property (cf. conditional criterion);
- 2) its universal value (cf. Convention and Guidelines, article 3);
- 3) its representativeness (cf. Guidelines, criteria (ii) (iii) (iv) (v) and (vi);
- 4) its delineation with regard to its integrity;
- 5) the special problems posed by towns.

#### 1) AUTHENTICITY

The principle of the authenticity of a building precludes the replacement of an old element by a new. In practice, even ruins require maintenance and protection, and monuments that are still in use need periodic repair and occasional additions. There are also the cases of Japanese architecture in wood and numerous types of vernacular architecture that are regularly reconstituted in conformity with a fixed design; therefore it is not so much reconstitution that is condemned in principle as erroneous or fanciful restoration. Many countries have, even in our own day, made conjectural reconstitutions of archaeological sites on the basis of very humble ruins. Lastly, whereas many illustrious monuments of the West have been brought by their nineteenth-century restorers to their so-called original state, the Venice Charter recommends, on the contrary, that the contributions of succeeding centuries be retained. Now that the nineteenth-century restoration of an ancient monument be regarded as a betrayal of the past or as the contribution of another century? By retaining the cathedral of Spire and excluding Hildesheim, the Committee has not, as yet, settled the matter. With this in mind, you might perhaps accept the following distinction between:

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- 1) an improper and haphazard restoration which has quite simply disregarded the originality and therefore the authenticity of the monument; and
- 2) an operation that has, in effect, transcended the original monument and turned it into a work typical of the nineteenth century. Such a work would be judged for what it means in the context of that century; in such a case, furthermore, it is not impossible that the criterion of representation of a great national or transnational religious or philosophical idea might lend weight to the particular interest of the property.

2) UNIVERSALITY

"Universal value from the point of view of history, art or science" is required by the Convention (Art. 1). The object must also be "representative" of a culture. Ensuing arguments that set "national value" against "international value" often seem ambiguous to me, especially since a particular cultural value can in itself be transnational and at the same time exist below the level of the nation, whether it represents a culture of the past or the culture of a living community within the nation or a transnational culture.

Bearing in mind the recommendation to be especially circumspect in the application of criterion (vi) (a property associated with events, ideas or beliefs), might we consider the following as being positive features:

- a) the case where the quality of the property itself earns its recognition as a representative symbol;
- b) the case where the property itself constitutes an important series;
- c) the case where the property is an integral part of the series that forms the characteristic feature of the property involved in world history (cases cited by Portugal, Bulgaria etc.)

3) REPRESENTATIVENESS

The problem can now be seen in terms of "representativeness" and of the "serial perception" of the cultural heritage. In view of the large number of disputed cases, the idea should be refined and a code of practice laid down. The Guidelines clarify the different aspects of this representativeness (being an outstanding example, having exerted great influence or bearing testimony to a civilization which has disappeared), but the notion of series presupposes a homogeneity that is rarely relevant in the sphere of culture. Where faithful replicas are made by a single studio, or in the case of deliberate imitation, the field would be too restricted to constitute a series. If on the other hand representativeness is taken in a very wide sense, what the field gains in breadth it loses in relevance.

This is why the Committee has adopted the practice of including a series as a whole: (Ghanaian forts, for example), especially in those cases where an isolated element would not in itself carry conviction, and where it is the very number of similar properties within a limited area that gives them value and significance.

4) DELINEATION OF PROPERTIES

What, then, is to be done with a series of properties each one of which could justifiably be included on its own? Must they eclipse one another, representativeness of one rendering the others superfluous? Perhaps this is the crux of the objections sometimes raised to the number of cathedrals and mosques on the list?

Among cases of equally high merit each of which shows a distinct aspect of the series, should precedence be given to the first dossiers presented? Should not the argument that applied to a series of modest elements whose number gives merit to the whole apply also to the prestigious series, in other words, should the latter not be included in its entirety, or in its best individual elements? Similarly if one country is seen to be characterized by its role of discoverer of the great seaways of the world, is it not in order for other countries to define themselves basically in terms of their homogeneous series of mosques, cathedrals or Hanseatic ports?

5) SPECIAL PROBLEMS POSED BY TOWNS

We have already emphasized that the Committee has accepted a great variety of presentations of the national heritage, some particularly stressing isolated monuments, others towns, others considerable areas of their territories.

Many towns have been included, and the dossiers of other towns are being considered. The size of the area to be included is discussed: sometimes it is judged to be too small, even though there are no absolute guarantees of protection outside a certain "core" in the World Heritage List does not serve to sanction the continued destruction of the rest.

We must also keep in mind the case of modern renovations which have already been carried out to the detriment of a formerly homogeneous fabric but which leave the rest intact.

We should note that the Convention does not make explicit mention of towns, but extends to them only through the concepts of sites and groups of buildings. It has to be acknowledged that the established criteria apply more readily to a monument than to a town or a large part of a great city.

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The authenticity of a town, for example, cannot be judged solely in terms of the sum of the authenticity of the buildings that make it up. In a living town, the interpretation of modern life with the architectural heritage is such that this modern life can just as easily destroy the town's authenticity as enhance it.

A town's representativeness as part of a series is very much more difficult to gauge than that of a monument. Each Italian town has its measure of "Italian-ness", but each has a greater measure of originality. Which one, then, could represent them all, if not Rome, which in fact expresses much more its own singularity and universality (its "Romanity", in short)?

We have begun to recognise the specificity of the question of towns by drawing up a special nomination form.

Before new nominations of this kind are encouraged, towns nominated by countries whose representatives have good reason for considering them representative are not to be definitively excluded. I consider it necessary that a more precise frame of reference, linked with the global typology, be studied, so that when this study has been carried out, you will be able to make decisions in this domain to which we shall be able to refer.

Such, Mr Chairman, are the suggestions I wished to make. They imply that today's priority is research, and that priority in your decisions should be given not so much to individual cases as to the very specific, basic choices which today, after five years' of experience, enable us to distinguish the horizon of World Heritage, and clear both the Committee and ICOMOS of any charges of laxity or inconsistency. My basic misgiving about the practice of choosing solely on the basis of individual cases is that it might, in the end, by force of circumstances produce a list that lacked consistency and would consequently lose some of its credibility. ICOMOS is conscious of this risk and no effort will be spared to avoid it.

Michel PARENT