Heritage@Risk!

Notes from the ICOMOS Conference – München, Germany – July 3-5 2000

As part of the Heritage@Risk initiative developed by ICOMOS since 1998, a Panel of ICOMOS members met in Munich, Germany, under the auspices of ICOMOS Germany and the German and Bavarian authorities. Experts presented and reviewed individual cases, regional and thematic reports on threats to cultural heritage, monuments and sites to help shape ICOMOS' First Global Report on the state and threats to cultural heritage, according to the objective set in the announcement made to all ICOMOS members in March 2000 by the Heritage@Risk taskforce. The Report will be launched at the Bethlehem Conference, in October 2000. The Heritage@Risk Taskforce is composed of Sheridan Burke (Australia), Dinu Bumbaru (Canada) and Michael Petzet (Germany), international President of ICOMOS and chair of the Munich Panel meeting. The Heritage@Risk initiative is a collegial effort and involves as contributors / authors, the members, National and International Scientific Committees of ICOMOS worldwide.

1. Presentations

Panel participants made brief summary presentations under three broad themes: initiatives; situations; types of cultural heritage. Presentations described individual cases, general trends affecting countries, regions or types of cultural heritage and responses to these threats.

- World Monuments Watch initiative of the World Monuments Fund
- Blue Shield (International Blue Shield Committee and related ICOMOS activities)
- National initiatives: Report on Buildings at Risk (United Kingdom); Landcare (Australia).
- Africa – West and South (Zanzibar, Zimbabwe, Nigeria)
- Arab World (Egypt, Morocco, Jordan, "Jerusalem", Yemen, Oman)
- Asia (Kobe, Pagan, Hanoi, Singapore, Sri Lanka, India)
- Australia and the Pacific islands states
- Europe (Czech Republic, Slovakia, Romania, Poland, Scandinavia, UK, Italy)
- North America (United States, Canada)

2. Individual cases

Several individual cases were mentioned during the meeting. In particular,

- Angkor Wat (Cambodia)
- Machu Pichu (Peru)
- Pagan (Myanmar)
- Petra (Jordan)
- Pompeii (Italy)
- Pyramids (Egypt)
- Religious heritage (sacred places, pilgrimages, churches, monasteries)
- Settlements (vernacular, villages, rural heritage, cities, urban neighbourhoods)
- Cultural landscapes
- Earthworks, archaeological sites, petroglyphs
- Physical and social surroundings of protected monuments or sites
- Site collections and associated museums and archives

3. Trends

Although the Panel did not mean to achieve an exhaustive inventory of threats or types of cultural properties, it did propose a thematic organisation based. The following notes as a summary of this classification:

Physical / Natural phenomena

- Weathering of materials
- Natural hazard (earthquake, storm, wind, floods)
- Fire
- Climate (humidity, frost, heat, sun light)

Social / Human behaviour

- Development / political pressure
- Lack of maintenance
- Vandalism, theft
- Religious / ethnic pressure
- Accelerated obsolescence or abandonment
- Tourism

Administrative / Professional

- Lack of skilled and committed professionals / weakened institutions and staff
- Inefficient control of works (materials, techniques, labour)
- Absence of proper planning / design control
- Loss of traditional skills and rites
- Lack of adequate management plans
- Inadequate legislation / implementation

4. Report

The purpose of the first ICOMOS Global Report on Heritage @ Risk is to identify global, regional or thematic trends, show case studies and examples illustrating threatened monuments, sites and, in a global definition, immovable cultural properties, and provide examples of initiative taken to address these threats. ICOMOS' international network has a mandate to encourage dissemination of inspiring solutions and models to help take better care of the cultural heritage. Such examples could include the Landmark Trust (UK) which helps save redundant heritage buildings, or HABS/HAERS (Historic American Building Records and Engineering Record Survey in the USA) which docu-

ments similar cases. Also, every three years, the Heritage@Risk Report will produce a report-card for sites or themes mentioned in previous editions of the Report.

The presentations made during the Munich Panel meeting, and the written reports received so far by ICOMOS are not exhaustive but provide a strong base to enable the production of ICOMOS Global Report. It has been decided to follow up with National Committees, International Scientific Committees and partner organisations to complete the series of written reports by August 31 at the latest so as to meet the very tight production schedule. The Global Report is expected to be written in English but providing for summaries in other ICOMOS working languages. It will have a communication plan including its posting on ICOMOS' Website, for National and International Scientific Committees to use to promote the report and act as advocates for local trends, threats and solutions with national or local media, thus helping to raise community awareness.

5. Links to other initiatives

The Heritage@Risk initiative is not seen as an isolated exercise. While it remains an ICOMOS project, endorsed by the General Assembly and focused on its network of members grouped under National and International Scientific Committees, it provides a valuable opportunity to enhance co-operation within the ICOMOS system and with other organisations in the field.

For instance, ICOMOS has recently set up an International Scientific Committee on Risk Preparedness (ICORP). It is currently being activated to develop standards to integrate risk preparedness to the common conservation practice. While ICORP has a focus on risks leading to emergency situations, it could link with Heritage@Risk. ICOMOS is a founding signatory of the International Committee of the Blue Shield. The Heritage@Risk Report could serve as a model in that context.

On the other hand, ICOMOS has contacts or agreements with international organisations like TICCIH and Docomomo. Docomomo has established a form heritage watch for Modern Monuments. Such initiatives and others to come could be connected in some way to the ICOMOS' Global Report.

The proposal for a meeting to be held in Istanbul, Turkey, in 2001 on the special theme of Heritage@Risk also offers great potential for improving the operation of this initiative and its constructive impacts on cultural heritage.

The Panel also discussed the great potential for co-operation and co-ordination of the "World Monuments Watch" launched by the World Monuments Fund. Developing common criteria and making the ICOMOS network a contributor to the WMF exercise could be envisaged in a short future as Heritage@Risk leads to a First Report.

Dinu Bumbaru, ICOMOS Canada

List of participants:

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