

Preventive Monitoring and World Heritage

One of the most essential tasks of ICOMOS within the framework of the World Heritage Convention of 1972 is our work as advisory body to the World Heritage Committee and to UNESCO on issues concerning the World Cultural Heritage, in particular the evaluation of monuments and sites that have been placed on the World Heritage List or are under consideration for listing. The mandate and function of the advisory bodies ICOMOS, IUCN and ICCROM result from articles 8 (3), 13 (7) and 14 (2) of the World Heritage Convention in connection with paragraphs 30 and 31 of the Operational Guidelines. One of the responsibilities of the advisory bodies is “to monitor the state of conservation of World Heritage properties” (OG § 31). The role of ICOMOS is described in paragraph 35: “The specific role of ICOMOS in relation to the Convention includes: evaluation of properties nominated for inscription on the World Heritage List, monitoring the state of conservation of World Heritage cultural properties, reviewing requests for International Assistance submitted by State Parties, and providing input and support for capacity-building activities” (OG § 35). Just as article 5 of the World Heritage Convention commits the State Parties to take care of the protection and conservation of the entire cultural and natural heritage within their territories, i. e. not only of the individual World Heritage sites, every National Committee of ICOMOS also has – in accordance with article 4 of our Statutes – a special responsibility for the monuments and sites of its country, of course in cooperation with all institutions concerned with protection and conservation.

Under these circumstances, based on the different experiences in their countries, individual National Committees have already developed special initiatives for the monitoring of the state of conservation of World Heritage sites in their countries, and in reports they have pointed at the imminent dangers (many reports also published in our Heritage at Risk series). All in all, this is a programme which can be called proactive or preventive monitoring. With its continuous observation such preventive monitoring differs from the Periodic Reporting described in the Operational Guidelines (V, 199-210) and from Reactive Monitoring (IV.A, 169-176). For this preventive monitoring refers not only to individual World Heritage sites of outstanding universal value, but in accordance with article 5 of the World Heritage Convention to the entire cultural heritage – which means that ICOMOS with up to 9,000 members acts as a sort of general “monument watch” observing the state of conservation worldwide.

The obligation of the State Parties to do Periodic Reporting results from article 29 of the World Heritage Convention, together with chapter V of the Operational Guidelines (§ 190, 191, and 199-210). Independently of the Periodic Reporting the World Heritage Centre is to be informed about exceptional circumstances or work “which may have an effect on the state of conservation of the property”: Reactive Monitoring comprises all procedures initiated by reports of the State Parties to the Convention or by information from a third party with regard to measures at or near World Heritage sites. The World Heritage

Centre can consult the advisory bodies, asking them for their evaluation. Practice has shown, however, that the handling of the monitoring mandate in accordance with Reactive Monitoring does not always have the desired results. Especially in acute problematic cases the whole procedure has proved to be too slow and can only be applied in particularly serious cases. However, with the state of conservation of every World Heritage site bigger or smaller problems and threats may occur which are either not sufficiently taken care of or not recognized early enough by the State Parties or by the authorities for protection and conservation of monuments and sites. All in all, these are an abundance of sometimes very acute threats to the historic fabric, and normally these problems are not mentioned in the process of Periodic Reporting, nor can they be solved in time within Reactive Monitoring. Especially at extensive sites values defining World Heritage can be affected by an immense number of plans and projects.

Therefore, in this wide area of conservation problems a continuous proactive observation has to take place, i. e. preventive monitoring, which takes into consideration the more general conservation concerns and the special criteria of the World Heritage justifying the outstanding universal value. As far as the World Cultural Heritage is concerned, this task can only be tackled by the advisory body ICOMOS and its worldwide net of 9,000 members organized in more than 150 national and international committees. The corresponding mandate can be deduced from the above-mentioned articles of the World Heritage Convention, together with the mandate to be found in the Operational Guidelines “to monitor the state of conservation of World Heritage properties” (§ 31).

It is very much to be hoped that all National Committees of ICOMOS, in special cases supported by the International Committees, will attend to the task of Preventive Monitoring in the future. After all, the National Committees, which have to look after the state of conservation of the entire stock of monuments and sites in their country, are our first contacts on the national level. It is also easier for the National Committees to get at the necessary information on the state of conservation of World Heritage sites in their country. And they can report on all current threats and problems. The reports by the National Committees will be sent to the International Secretariat of ICOMOS so that our headquarters in Paris can decide how to inform the World Heritage Centre. Then in particularly serious cases the procedure described above as Reactive Monitoring can be the result. In any case, from our experience, involving the ICOMOS National Committees as early as possible with the task of Preventive Monitoring will make it possible in many cases to avoid threats and conflicts with other interests through appropriate counselling.

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Paris, February 2008