ICOMOS, the States Parties and the Transforming Frameworks of World Heritage valuation

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Outstanding Universal Value, the key concept to the entire World Heritage system, is not an intrinsic value, something to be discovered in a place proposed for the World Heritage candidature.[1] Rather the Outstanding Universal Value is established in a complicated transnational process of expert valuation, involving the States Parties, ICOMOS (for cultural heritage) / IUCN (for natural heritage) and the World Heritage Committee. In this process, the statements compiled by ICOMOS (called "Evaluations") act as important intermediaries between the often nationalist discourses on cultural significance articulated in the World Heritage nominations by states and the final decisions made by the World Heritage Committee. In this article, I will use examples of ICOMOS evaluations on urban heritage nominations to shed light on recent developments regarding some key concepts and procedures in the World Heritage valuation system: the transforming roles of cultural criteria, authenticity, integrity and comparative frameworks in assessing Outstanding Universal Value; and the understanding of local community involvement.

By no means is this discussion aiming to be exhaustive. I explored in detail the time-bound and multilayered construction of Outstanding Universal Value in the context of World Heritage-inscribed cities during the more than 30 years of implementation of the World Heritage Convention (1978–2011) in a book titled "Valuing World Heritage Cities", where I also explain the definition of a World Heritage city and the selection criteria for the group of World Heritage sites for which the ICOMOS evaluations were consulted. Here it suffices to note that I understand a World Heritage city to be an inhabited urban area sustaining everyday activities and supporting a living urban fabric. Based on this definition I identified altogether 187 World Heritage sites, inscribed between the years 1978 and 2011, as World Heritage cities. Most of these sites are traditional historic city centres (or sections of them), but a few cultural landscapes, the Outstanding Universal Value of which was defined primarily in reference to urban features, were included in the data as well, one example being the Dresden Elbe Valley (Germany, 2004). Furthermore, I consulted ICOMOS evaluations examining the 41 cases of rejected nominations of urban heritage during the same time period from 1978 until 2011.[2] I also acquainted myself with national nomination dossiers concerning Nordic World Heritage sites.[3]

Main trends in the development of cultural criteria, authenticity and integrity

The key heritage values and attributes which constitute the Outstanding Universal Value are outlined in the criteria presented in the Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention. Just as the entire *Operational Guidelines* document, the criteria have also been subject to regular modification over the years since the World Heritage Convention was put into practice. Several authors have discussed the evolution of the criteria and identified the most notable periods of change in relation to them.[4] These include the early period (1977–80), the mid-1990s, and, to a lesser degree, the year 2005. When comparing the first version of the *Operational Guidelines* (1977) and the 1980 version, several changes to the cultural criteria can be detected. Whilst the removal of the term "aesthetic achievement" from criterion i meant a widening of scope, most of the modifications worked to restrict certain types of future nominations. Especially the limitations to the use of criterion vi, to be used only in exceptional circumstances, and the diminished role given to social values overall in the criteria contributed to this development. The narrow scope of the criteria was one factor that led to

a mainly monumental, elitist and architectural emphasis on World Heritage.

The wider conceptual reorientation concerning the key concepts of World Heritage took place during the early 1990s, and in many ways culminated in the adoption of the *Global Strategy for a Representative, Balanced and Credible World Heritage List* in 1994.[5] This also meant a notable reformulation of the cultural criteria used in the assessment of Outstanding Universal Value. Many of these changes, most importantly the re-establishment of social value with new references to "human" and "living" in the criteria texts, can be regarded as having contributed towards broader inclusiveness in the framework of the World Heritage List. Certainly, as noted by Christina Cameron and Mechtild Rössler, "the Convention's evolution could be characterized as the disappearance of the notion of artistic masterpiece".[6] This notwithstanding, even the present criteria show limitations in terms of their expression of other Heritage values than historical, architectural, aesthetic and scientific.[7] The most important change that was made in 2005 actually involved merging the two separate sets of natural and cultural criteria under a joint heading rather than significantly altering the individual criteria.

The two concepts of authenticity ("ensuring the ability of the property to convey significance") and integrity ("ensuring the ability of the property to sustain significance") have equally been in motion during the 40 years of implementation of the Convention.[8] The concept of authenticity, originally limited to a definition focusing on design, materials, workmanship and setting, today includes a wide range of attributes. On the other hand, the concept of integrity, denoting "a measure of the wholeness and intactness",[9] was first introduced from natural heritage conservation to the assessment of cultural World Heritage in 2005. An increasing reflection on these two concepts is expected from the States Parties, when they write nomination dossiers, and from ICOMOS, when the organization compiles evaluation documents.

Use of cultural criteria for urban heritage 1978 – 2011

Another perspective on the criteria is of course their use in actual practice by the states, by ICOMOS, and by the World Heritage Committee. When preparing nominations, the States Parties often propose too many rather than too few criteria, in the hope that this will increase the chances for a successful inscription. A closer look at the accepted criteria of inscribed urban sites, however, shows that very few cities have been considered to fulfil a wide range of criteria by ICOMOS and the World Heritage Committee. Among the 187 urban World Heritage sites included in the World Heritage List between the years 1978 and 2011, only one, Venice and its Lagoon, was credited with all six cultural criteria, and another six with five criteria (Damascus, Rome, Florence, Kairouan, Ferrara, and Assisi). In the case of further 14 urban sites, the World Heritage Committee found four criteria valid. In other words, in the majority of cases two or three criteria have been found fitting. However, there were also 22 urban inscriptions made referring to only a single criterion.[10]

Which criteria have recently been most often utilized in the context of urban heritage is equally interesting. The overall trend seems to be towards a more limited use. Even though still proposed by the states occasionally, between 2002 and 2011 criterion i ("represent a masterpiece of human creative genius") was used only once in reference to cities, namely in the context of the inscription of the Canal Area of Amsterdam in 2011. Although since 2005 it has been possible to use criterion vi "preferably in conjunction with other criteria", its application continues to be a rare exercise. Also criterion v ("be an outstanding example of a traditional human settlement, land-use, or sea-use which is representative of a culture (or cultures), or human interaction with the environment especially when it has become vulnerable under the impact of irreversible change") has been used sporadically. Furthermore, in its recent decisions ICOMOS indicated that the application of criterion ii ("exhibit an important interchange of human values, over a span of time or within a cultural area of the world, on developments in architecture or technology, monumental arts or town-planning and landscape design") should occur more seldom.[11] In other words, most future urban nominations should fall under criterion iii ("bear a unique or at least exceptional testimony to a cultural tradition or to a civilization which is living or which has disappeared") and criterion iv ("be an outstanding example of a type of building or architectural or technological ensemble or landscape which illustrates (a) significant stage(s) in human history").[12] (Fig. 1)

The World Heritage Committee and ICOMOS cooperate closely in the definition and application of the criteria. These two bodies draft the criteria together, even though they are officially accepted by the Committee. When writing its evaluations, ICOMOS is expected to clarify the justification of various criteria. At present this reflection is done in a much more precise and coordinated manner than at the early stage of the implementation of the Convention, as ICOMOS

1 Old Rauma (Finland), inscribed on the World Heritage List in 1991 under criteria iv and v

engages itself in a rather lengthy discussion concerning each criterion proposed by the state. Often the organization refuses one or several suggested criteria, or adds criteria, which it sees fitting but which are lacking in the original nomination. However, what is important to note is that whilst obviously ICOMOS cannot step outside the criteria's framework entirely when evaluating the nominations – this has been visible for example in the organization's lack of discussion concerning social values, which remain partially unspecified in the criteria – it is equally clear that the organization is not merely reproducing the criteria but interpreting them in each individual case. The flexibility that the cultural criteria have allowed over the years is well illustrated in ICOMOS' parallel use of criteria iv and vi in association with Liverpool in 2004 and Guanajuato and Potosi in the late 1980s. Whilst the former was linked to world economic history and global trading by using criterion iv,[13] in the case of the latter almost an identical association was made by utilizing criterion vi.[14]

Furthermore, while the World Heritage Committee and ICOMOS usually agree on the application of the criteria, there have been a few instances over the years in which the Committee, when making the final decision concerning the inscription of a site, has decided to delete, or add, a criterion against the recommendation by ICOMOS. This is most notable when the Committee decides to inscribe a nomination that has originally been proposed for rejection or deferral by ICOMOS. This was the case with the nomination of Lübeck in the mid-1980s. While ICOMOS proposed a rejection of the nomination based on the haphazard conservation that had been conducted earlier with regard to the historic city, the Bureau of the World Heritage Committee decided to defer the nomination because it was of the opinion that criterion iv could be met if a more restricted delimitation of the World Heritage area was made. Germany decided to withdraw the nomination before its handling in the World Heritage Committee meeting and proposed the site anew after a few years. With regard to the new nomination, composed of three separate zones and excluding the commercial centre, which after World War II had been exposed to very extensive redevelopment, ICOMOS, somewhat reluctantly, saw criterion iv fulfilled.[15] Another more recent example is Historic Bridgetown and its Garrison, which was included in the World Heritage List in 2011. While ICOMOS in its evaluation did not find any criterion justified at once and proposed a deferral of the nomination by Barbados, the World Heritage Committee was of the opinion that ICOMOS had not fully reflected on the values of Bridgetown, and designated the site as World Heritage by referring to criteria ii, iii and iv.[16]

Authenticity, integrity and comparative assessments

Recent research has emphasized the negotiated nature of the concept of authenticity within the discourses of World Heritage.[17] Whereas the "Nara Document on Authenticity" as early as in 1994 recognized authenticity as a multi-dimensional and relative concept, the States Parties have clung to "the rational and universalized definition of the four degrees of authenticity in nomination dossiers".[18] This also applies to ICOMOS, even though to a lesser degree.[19] At present, the concept of authenticity is in a state of transition in relation to the concept of integrity. There have been proposals from within the World Heritage organization, mainly from practitioners of natural heritage, to merge the two concepts.[20] In light of some recent urban nominations and evaluations we find integrity and authenticity considered in very similar ways.[21] Material authenticity and visual integrity remain important considerations for ICOMOS; however, one should hope that the combined use of authenticity and integrity concepts will also include their socio-cultural dimensions.

All in all, as the concepts of authenticity and integrity are currently given more consideration in the process of defining Outstanding Universal Value, the criteria seem to have a somewhat declining role as part of ICOMOS' evaluation work. Another procedure working in a similar way is the comparative assessments, which today are considered increasingly important by ICOMOS. This is hardly surprising in a situation where the number of sites on the World Heritage List has rapidly increased, surpassing 1,000 in number.

When looking at the ICOMOS evaluations concerning the five urban sites (La Chaux-de-Fonds/Le Locle, Albi, Ribeira Grande, Amsterdam, and George Town) which were inscribed on the World Heritage List between 2009 and 2011, it becomes clear that ICOMOS is rarely completely satisfied with how the States Parties carry out the comparative analysis. Those involved in compiling new national nominations today obviously need to make far wider comparisons than their predecessors, not least because of the size of the present World Heritage List, and the ever more encompassing national Tentative Lists. It is fair to say that the States Parties nowadays make more extensive comparative assessments; however, ICOMOS often still finds these comparisons partial, especially as regards the chosen frameworks of comparison or the best comparative pair. For example, the organization was of the opinion that Amsterdam should have been compared with Antwerp in more depth,[22] and the Bardados Garrison with Nelson's Dockyard in Antigua.[23] Another view that

ICOMOS often expresses is the need to widen the thematic, cultural and geographic scope of the comparison. In the case of Albi ICOMOS requested the comparative study to elaborate on episcopal cities, medieval urban centres, and the originality of the role played by brick building in the wider European scale.[24] In the case of Amsterdam, the comparison could have been extended to a global scale to include some Dutch colonial cities, as well as New York.[25] But it is not always wider comparative frameworks that are lacking. In reference to the watchmaking towns La Chaux-de-Fonds and Le Locle, after the State Party had successfully proven on a comparative basis the rarity of the two towns in terms of their town planning and "integration of premises for living and premises for working", ICOMOS felt that another supplementing comparative framework could have been "the architectural motif of the workshop window and its integration in urban housing planning".[26]

Balancing between transnational, national and local community values

In her research that explores national World Heritage nomination dossiers concerning industrial and religious sites in a global perspective, Sophia Labadi points out how the States Parties, when submitting nominations, mainly wish to construct a narrative of "continuity, uniformity and stability of the nation".[27] Despite the far-reaching regional harmonization efforts among the Nordic countries concerning their World Heritage nominations since the mid-1980s, the "imagined and practiced Nordic community of World Heritage, while devoid of openly nationalist uses of the past, has not presented any significant challenge to national framings of Heritage, nor has it even intended to do so".[28] ICOMOS, on the other hand, even though not wishing, nor being able to fully depart from the States Parties' representation of their *own* pasts, has wanted to highlight global and transnational histories, which it understands to represent a supra-national World Heritage identity.[29]

I have argued that the continuous balancing act between national and transnational narratives, which has characterized ICOMOS evaluations, has meant a marginalization of the view of urban and local histories as part of the definition of Outstanding Universal Value. Furthermore, there are parallels to be found between how the local people of the past were treated and how the role of local communities of today is understood. Despite the fact that a wide consensus about the need to involve local communities and to integrate local values and practices into the management of World Heritage

2   Old Rauma (Finland), World Heritage since 1991,
different readings of heritage in urban space

sites exists, the understanding of Outstanding Universal Value as something separate from the local community values remains influential in the discourse.[30] Whereas States Parties consider local populations often as threats to the site,[31] ICOMOS frequently understands local community involvement to mean the local population's acceptance of protection and its awareness of the values identified by experts.[32] (Fig. 2)

As a conclusion, it may be noted that the European states compiling new nominations in the 2010s face an ambiguous task. When thinking truly globally, there is no large demand for new World Heritage sites in Europe. When thinking in terms of underrepresented types of cultural heritage, many important representatives can of course still be found in Europe. Individual candidates also face competition in the national context, and many factors, not always having to do with

Outstanding Universal Value, guide the national-level decision-making.

Finally, I would like to encourage those who are in the position to draft new World Heritage nominations to be aware of the language they use in framing heritage, for heritage discourses not only reflect but also constitute social practices. For example, and in line with Emma Waterton's, Laurajane Smith's and Gary Cambell's findings concerning the Australian Burra Charter text,[33] it may be pointed out that the descriptions of local communities in ICOMOS evaluations and in national nomination dossiers often use various discursive legitimizing techniques to strengthen the authority of experts and to diminish the role of non-expert participants. Should local communities not be given an active (discursive) role as "parties" in the protection of World Heritage?

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Zusammenfassung
ICOMOS, die Vertragsstaaten und das sich wandelnde Rahmenwerk der Welterbebewertung

Welterbestätten sind nach Definition der UNESCO Orte, die einen außergewöhnlichen universellen Wert besitzen. Dieser Wert wird in Bezug auf die tatsächlichen Eigenschaften dieser Orte in einem komplexen Verfahren mit internationalen Gutachten festgelegt, bei dem die Vertragsstaaten, ICOMOS (für Kulturerbe) und das Welterbekomitee beteiligt werden.

Der Beitrag beleuchtet die verschiedenen Formulierungen des außergewöhnlichen universellen Wertes im Rahmen der Städte, die zwischen 1978 und 2011 in die Welterbeliste aufgenommen wurden. Der Artikel untersucht aktuelle Entwicklungen im Hinblick auf Schlüsselkonzepte und -abläufe des Welterbe-Evaluationssystems: die veränderte Rolle der Aufnahmekriterien für Kulturerbe, der Authentizität und Integrität sowie der Vergleichenden Analyse beim Bewerten des OUV und das Verständnis der Beteiligung der örtlichen Vertreter. Was kann man nach 30 Jahren Erfahrung in der Umsetzung der Welterbekonvention lernen?

Notes

1 Sophia Labadi, UNESCO, Cultural Heritage, and Outstanding Universal Value. Value-based Analyses of the World Heritage and Intangible Cultural Heritage Conventions, Lanham 2013; Tanja Vahtikari, Valuing World Heritage Cities, London 2017. For discussion concerning Heritage values as socially and culturally constructed, see Randall Mason, Assessing Values in Conservation Planning: Methodological Issues and Choices, in: Marta de la Torre (ed.), Assessing the Values of Cultural Heritage, Los Angeles 2002, pp. 5–30; Lisanne Gibson/John Pendlebury, Introduction: Valuing Historic Environments, in: Lisanne Gibson/John Pendlebury (ed.), Valuing Historic Environments, Farnham 2009, pp. 1–16.

2 Vahtikari (note 1).

3 Tanja Vahtikari, From National to World Heritage via the Regional: Harmonizing Heritage in the Nordic Countries, forthcoming.

4 Sarah M. Titchen, On the Construction of Outstanding Universal Value: UNESCO's World Heritage Convention and the Identification and Assessment of Cultural Places for Inclusion in the World Heritage List. Unpublished PhD. diss., Australian National University 1995; Henry Cleere, The Concept of 'Outstanding Universal Value' in the World Heritage Convention, in: Conservation and Management of Archaeological Sites, Vol. 1 (1996), Issue 4, pp. 227–233; Christina Cameron/Mechtild Rossler, Many Voices, One Vision: The Early Years of the World Heritage Convention, Farnham 2013; Labadi (note 1).

5 UNESCO, World Heritage Committee, Eighteenth Session (Phuket, Thailand, 12–17 December 1994), Report of the Expert Meeting on the "Global Strategy" and Thematic Studies for a Representative World Heritage List (UNESCO Headquarters, 20–22 June 1994), WHC.94/CONF.003/INF.06, Paris, 13 October 1994, pp. 3/4, 6: http://whc.unesco.org/archive/1994/whc-94-conf003-inf6e.pdf (viewed on: 14.8.2017).

6 Cameron/Rossler (note 4), p. 101.

7 Vahtikari (note 1), passim.

8 Herb Stovel, ICOMOS Position Paper, in: Oliver Martin/Giovanna Piatti (ed.), World Heritage and Buffer Zones. International Expert Meeting on World Heritage and Buffer Zones, Davos, Switzerland 11–14 March 2008, Paris 2009, pp. 23–42, here p. 27/28.

9 UNESCO, Operational Guidlines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention, 8 July 2015, Article 88.

10 The criteria have been drawn from World Heritage List: http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/ (viewed on: 12.12.2015). For a table summarizing the used criteria for urban sites 1978–2011, see Vahtikari (note 1), Appendix 3.

11 ICOMOS evaluation for the nomination of the World Heritage property, "La Chaux-de-Fonds/Le Locle", Switzerland, No 1302, 10 March 2009.

12 Vahtikari (note 1), pp. 190/191.

13 ICOMOS evaluation for the nomination of the World Heritage property, "Liverpool", United Kingdom, No 1150, March 2004.

14 ICOMOS evaluation for the nomination of the World Heritage property, "Guanajuato", Mexico, No 482, September 1988; ICOMOS evaluation for the nomination of the World Heritage property, "Potosi", Bolivia, No 420, April 1987.

15 Vahtikari (note 1), p. 127.

16 UNESCO, World Heritage Committee, Thirty-Fifth Session, Paris, (UNESCO Headquarters 19–29 June 2011), Summary Record, WHC-11/35.COM.INF.20, pp. 205/206: http://whc.unesco.org/archive/2011/whc11-35com-inf20.pdf (viewed on: 14.8.2017); Vahtikari (note 1), p. 37.

17 Tanja Vahtikari, Historic Cities, World Heritage Value and Change, in: Auvo Kostiainen/Taina Syrjymaa (ed.), Touring the Past: Uses of History in Tourism, Savonlinna 2008, pp. 132–150; Sophia Labadi, World Heritage, Authenticity and Post-Authenticity. International and National Perspectives, in: Sophia Labadi/Colin Long (ed.), Heritage and Globalisation, London 2010, pp. 66–84.

18 Labadi (note 1), p. 125.

19 Vahtikari (note 1), p. 131.

20 Stovel (note 8), pp. 27/28.

21 See, for example note 11.

22 ICOMOS evaluation for the nomination of the World Heritage property, "The Canal Area of Amsterdam", Netherlands, No 1349, 17 March 2010.

23 ICOMOS evaluation for the nomination of the World Heritage property, "Bridgetown and it Garrison", Barbados, No 1376, 10 March 2011.

24 ICOMOS evaluation for the nomination of the World Heritage property, "Episcopal City of Albi", France, No 1337, 17 March 2010.

25 See note 22.

26 See note 11.

27 Sophia Labadi, Representations of the Nation and Cultural Diversity in Discourses on World Heritage, in: Journal of Social Archaeology, Vol. 7 (2007), Issue 2, pp. 147–170, here p. 160, see also Labadi (note 1).

28 Vahtikari (note 3).

29 Vahtikari (note 1), pp. 67–74.

30 Ibid., p. 74, 184.

31 Labadi (note 1), p. 93.

32 See, for example, ICOMOS evaluation for the nomination of the World Heritage property, "Paramaribo", Surinam, No 940 rev, April 2002; ICOMOS evaluation for the nomination of the World Heritage property, "Mantua and Sabbioneta", Italy, No 1287, 11 March 2008; ICOMOS evaluation for the nomination of the World Heritage property, "Housing Estates in Berlin", Germany, No 1230, 11 March 2008; Vahtikari (note 1), p. 115.

33 Emma Waterton/Laurajane Smith/Gary Cambell, The Utility of Discourse Analysis to Heritage Studies: The Burra Charter and Social Inclusion, in: International Journal of Heritage Studies, Vol. 12 (2006), Issue 4, pp. 339–355, here pp. 348–350.

Picture credits

1 Kalle Saarinen, Rauma, 2013
2 Kalle Saarinen, Rauma, 2013