

WORLD HERITAGE: DEFINING THE OUTSTANDING UNIVERSAL VALUE

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Abstract

Of the conventions of UNESCO, the World Heritage Convention is the most important in the field of heritage protection. Having involved nearly all states of the world, it has also become a platform for debating the concepts and policies related to conservation. For sites to qualify to the World Heritage List they need to satisfy at least one of ten criteria as well as to meet the conditions of authenticity and integrity, in short, to have "outstanding universal value". In order to meet these requirements, one should approach the question as a process, identifying the relevant themes of universal nature (such as spirituality, defence, utilisation of resources), to verify the representivity in the pertinent cultural-historical context, and prepare and guarantee a management system and plan for the nominated resource. It is not easy to draw the line, defining what could be eligible to the World Heritage List, and what would be of national or local significance. A series of cases can be examined, which tend to remain on the margin, including the town hall of Bremen in Germany, Kuressaare Fortress in Estonia, the towns of Ubeda and Baeza in Spain, and St. Kilda in United Kingdom.

Key words: World Heritage, outstanding universal value, Bremen, Kuressaare Fortress, Ubeda, Baeza, Provins.

Some concepts in relation to World Heritage

The World Heritage Convention is certainly the most visible international achievement of the modern movement in the conservation of cultural heritage. Over these past fifty or so years, international collaboration has been intensified in various forms. Not least of these is the process of globalisation, involving a number of intergovernmental organizations and multinational commercial companies. In this context, the concepts and initiatives related to the protection of the world's cultural and natural heritage has become an activity of worldwide impact over the past two or three decades.

During this same period, the idea of cultural heritage has been expanded covering practically the entire built environment, not to speak of the recent acquisition of the intangible dimension of heritage as demonstrated with the new UNESCO convention. UNESCO has also emphasised the need to recognise cultural diversity as a fundamental aspect of our heritage. In practice this brings a certain difficulty in the assessment of cultural values. In fact, there has been confusion about what should be intended by outstanding universal value in the context of the World Heritage Convention. In relation to natural heritage sites, this seems to be fairly straight forward, and there have been voices criticising the cultural field of not implementing the same clarity in the evaluation

of World Heritage nominations. The recent effort by ICOMOS to establish a framework for the identification of heritage sites can be understood as a step forward. However, it is necessary to continue the exploration.

The concept of “value”: IN RELATION TO CULTURAL HERITAGE, WE CAN UNDERSTAND VALUE AS A SOCIAL ASSOCIATION OF QUALITIES TO THINGS. Values are produced through cultural-social processes, learning and maturing of awareness. Considering the global framework of today’s world, the context for such processes is not limited to local community, but is extended to the international framework. One of the tasks of the World Heritage Convention is to counteract to stress the importance of the specificity of cultural heritage, and the subtlety of values.

The test of “authenticity”: Based on philosophical and critical reflections, authenticity has emerged as one of the issues in recent debates about conservation-restoration in the multicultural context. Authenticity is an issue of the truthfulness of a particular source of information, as noted in the conclusions of the Bergen meeting on authenticity (31 Jan.- 2 Feb. 1994; see: K-E Larsen and N. Marstein (eds.) *Conference on Authenticity in Relation to the World Heritage Convention*, Tapir, Norway 1994) and defined in the *Nara Document on Authenticity* (1-6 Nov. 1994; see: K-E Larsen (ed.) *Nara Conference on Authenticity*, UNESCO, ICCROM, ICOMOS, 1995). Authenticity can be referred to several attributes of the heritage resource from form to substance and other qualities. Synthesising such reflections, we can refer authenticity to three fundamental issues: the creative process, the documentary evidence, and the social context.

Modern thinkers, from Nietzsche to Benjamin, Heidegger and Cesare Brandi have referred to the idea that - instead of a *mimesis* (i.e. imitation of nature) - works of art are produced through a **creative process**, which gives specificity to each object. In the words of Prof. Paul Philippot, Director Emeritus of ICCROM, *the authenticity of a work of art is a measure of truthfulness of the internal unity of the creative process and the physical realisation of the work, and the effects of its passage through historic time*. A work produced through such a creative process differs from a work produced as a replica. The artistic or creative value of particular works can be assessed higher than of others. As Heidegger has said, the truth of such a work is more ‘luminous’.

Documentary evidence and authentication of sources of information refer to the second aspect of being authentic. This is most relevant in the historical and archaeological verification of a particular heritage resource. The test of authenticity should not be limited to one aspect ignoring another. Rather, it should be based on a critical examination of all the relevant aspects aiming at a balanced judgement as a synthesis. The social context and living traditions form the third aspect of authenticity, and have been given increasing attention particularly in multicultural communities, such as Canada (e.g., see writings by Charles Taylor). In traditional social-cultural context, particular consideration is given to the intangible dimension of heritage, the know-how and skills, as stressed in the UNESCO convention on intangible heritage and some national laws.

The condition of “integrity”: In relation to natural heritage sites, the concept of a biotope is defined a region environmentally uniform in conditions and in the flora and fauna which live there. Within a particular habitat, the different organisms living together interact forming an ecosystem within its own functional integrity. In reference to the built environment, the issue of integrity is relevant especially in relation to urban and regional planning processes, but also the Venice Charter refers to integrity (articles 6 to 14). The issue of integrity, is one of the elements of the theory of restoration by Cesare Brandi, and it is important in relation to the definition of the limits of restoration and re-integration of a work of art. Functional integrity is particularly obvious in the case of an industrial site,

such as factory, but it is equally relevant in urban fabric. Functional integrity provides the reference for the understanding of the meaning of the different elements in built environment. Structural integrity instead defines the present-day reality in the field, i.e. the elements that survive in today's historical condition from the evolving functions of the past. Even a relict cultural landscape can be defined in terms of its historical integrity. At the same time, the question of functional integrity is relevant to living urban or rural areas and the planning and management of their present-day use. Visual integrity is the result of certain processes. Therefore, in order to properly appreciate the existing realities and eventual changes, it is useful to again refer the analysis to the functional and historical-structural integrity.

From the above reflections we can conclude that the concepts of authenticity and integrity in relation to cultural heritage differ from each other. Authenticity is related to heritage as a qualifier, while integrity is referred to the identification of the functional and historical condition of the site. The two concepts thus defined can be seen as complementary. At the same time, one cannot replace the other.

Outstanding universal value and cultural diversity

In relation to cultural heritage the idea of universal value can be seen in the authentic (true) creative expressions of specific cultures. We can perceive cultural heritage of humanity to form its own universe, which is qualified by individual cultures and their products. As part of this human universe, a heritage resource will obtain "universal value" so far as it is a true and authentic expression of a particular culture. In relation to World Heritage, "outstanding" can be interpreted as: the best and/or most representative example or examples of a kind of heritage.

The World Heritage Convention sets the requirement of outstanding universal value from the point of view of history, art or science when dealing with monuments or groups of buildings, and from the historical, aesthetic, ethnological or anthropological points of view when the question is about sites (article 1). Natural heritage should meet this requirement from the aesthetic or scientific points of view (article 2). This requirement has been further articulated in the *Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention*, which define a set of ten criteria for the assessment of heritage properties. Furthermore, cultural heritage sites should meet the test of authenticity. Natural heritage instead should fulfil the condition of integrity depending on the character of the heritage concerned.

The participants of the Global Strategy Natural and Cultural Heritage Expert Meeting, in Amsterdam in 1998, gave the following definition to "outstanding universal value": *The requirement of outstanding universal value should be interpreted as an outstanding response to issues of universal nature common to or addressed by all human cultures. In relation to natural heritage, such issues are seen in bio-geographical diversity. In relation to culture in human creativity and resulting cultural processes.* (Linking Nature and Culture ..., Report, B. v. Droste et al. (eds.), Amsterdam 1998, p. 221)

Such responses will have different forms in the different cultural, social, political, economic and physical contexts, resulting in *cultural diversity*. In fact, UNESCO has given great prominence to this concept in its *Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity* (2001). Article 1 of the declaration defines cultural diversity as the common heritage of humanity: *Culture takes diverse forms across time and space. This diversity is embodied in the uniqueness and plurality of the identities of the groups and societies making up humankind. As a source of exchange, innovation and creativity, cultural diversity is as necessary for humankind as*

biodiversity is for nature. In this sense, it is the common heritage of humanity and should be recognized and affirmed for the benefit of present and future generations.

Heritage Identification Process

With reference to the debate undertaken by the World Heritage Committee and doing additional research, ICOMOS produced a report referring to representivity of the World Heritage List: *Filling the Gaps - an Action Plan for the Future, An Analysis by ICOMOS*, which was presented to the World Heritage Committee at its session in Suzhou, China, in July 2004. It is noted in this report that the World Heritage Convention is about the shared heritage of mankind. Therefore, there is a need to try and ensure that the world heritage of humankind, in all its diversity and complexity, is adequately reflected on the List. In its report, ICOMOS has compared and contrasted three complementary approaches to the analysis of the representivity of the World Heritage List in a report presented to the World Heritage Committee in Suzhou, June 2004:

- A TYPOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK
- B CHRONOLOGICAL-REGIONAL FRAMEWORK
- C THEMATIC FRAMEWORK

Thematic Framework

As already noted in the definition of the Global Strategy Meeting in Amsterdam, 1998, the fundamental reference in the representivity is the identification of the Thematic Framework. Based on the various reports by meetings and conferences related to the development of the Global Strategy, the ICOMOS report has identified six principal themes or issues as a basic reference for the identification of the outstanding universal value. These themes are the following:

THEMATIC FRAMEWORK

I. CULTURAL ASSOCIATIONS

- **Human interaction in society;**
- **Cultural and symbolic associations;**
- **Branches of knowledge**

III. SPIRITUAL RESPONSES

- **Spiritual and religious systems**

IV. UTILISATION OF NATURAL RESOURCES

- **Agriculture and food production;**
- **Mining and quarrying**
- **Systems of manufacturing**

II. EXPRESSIONS OF CREATIVITY

- **Monuments;**
- **Groups of buildings;**
- **Sites**

V. MOVEMENT OF PEOPLES

- **Migration, Nomadism, Slavery**
- **Routes and systems of transportation**

VI. DEVELOPMENT OF TECHNOLOGIES

The Process for defining the Significance of a Place

We have above discussed the concept of outstanding universal value and its association with certain themes of universal nature. Once such themes have been defined in relation to a particular heritage resource, it is necessary to identify its “cultural diversity factor”. In fact, considering that the World Heritage List is about outstanding representation, it is necessary to compare the heritage resource within the appropriate cultural and historical context, the Chronological-Regional Framework. This requires the identification of the relevant cultural region, where a particular cultural expression of a theme of universal nature can be found. Moreover, a nomination to the World Heritage List needs to meet the requirements for inscription established in the Convention and in the Operational Guidelines, and finally the property needs to have an appropriate management system to guarantee its conservation.

The first question that we should ask concerns the creation and development of the site. From this, we should then logically proceed to cover the other issues.

- A. **PRELIMINARY IDENTIFICATION OF THE HERITAGE RESOURCE:** What factors endorsed the foundation and development of a place? This preliminary proposition should be formed on the basis of cultural and historical research and the knowledge and understanding of the site and its context.
- B. **THEMATIC FRAMEWORK:** What are the relevant themes (issues) of universal nature? A particular site can be associated with one or more themes, indicated in the thematic framework noted above.
- C. **CHRONOLOGICAL-REGIONAL FRAMEWORK:** Does the property represent an outstanding response compared with the relevant chronological-regional context? The definition of the cultural region and period will be fundamental to the proper identification of the significance of the property concerned. In some cases, such as Modern Movement in Architecture, one should make reference to the different regions of the world. In other cases, the defined cultural region can be more limited depending on the type of cultural response on the site concerned. It is necessary also to consider what has already been inscribed on the World Heritage List, being a list of representation.
- D. **TYOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK:** How should the type of property be defined as a result of this analysis? The preliminary identification of the heritage resource may need to be redefined on the basis of the subsequent analysis, i.e. themes and cultural context. As a result, also taking into account the physical condition of the property, one has the challenge of identifying the most appropriate type of heritage responding to the values defined previously. In some cases, the result may be a single monument; in others a group of buildings or a site – as defined in the Operational Guidelines. In fact, it is noted that the present trend is to identify larger ensembles, such as groups of buildings or cultural landscapes, rather than individual monuments.
- E. **WORLD HERITAGE CRITERIA:** The identification of criteria should be based on the evaluation of the above potential themes in relevant spatial-cultural context, selecting those most relevant (i.e. the most important story or stories). The fact that a particular site or selection of sites is identified as the best or the most outstanding representation of a particular type of heritage does not necessarily mean that this property automatically would meet the World Heritage criteria. This is often a question of what themes have been identified, and how the relevant chronological-regional context has been defined.

- F. **AUTHENTICITY AND INTEGRITY:** On the basis of the above definition of the type of property and the potential criteria, it is necessary to identify the condition of integrity especially in relation to cultural landscapes and larger urban ensembles. Secondly, the elements selected for nomination should be tested as to their authenticity, i.e. historical and cultural truthfulness.
- G. **MANAGEMENT:** Once the property and its significance have been identified, it is necessary to proceed to the establishment of an appropriate management system and relevant plans. Conservation management must necessarily be based on the definition of the property with its buffer zone and the statement of significance. Therefore, a property to be nominated to the World Heritage List, generally requires a special treatment in this regard, including the involvement of relevant stakeholders and the development of monitoring systems.

Where to draw the line?

There are certain sites that seem to present no doubt about their outstanding universal value, including monuments or historic towns that everybody knows about, for example the Pyramids of Giza, some of the ancient capital cities such as Rome, or sites such as Angkor or monuments such as Taj Mahal. There are other sites, which may well be of outstanding universal value, but which are not obvious. In recent years, the World Heritage Committee has encouraged States Parties to propose nominations of the types of heritage that are less or not at all represented on the List. The identification of such sites is often not easy and not without conflicting opinions. This is partly due to the novelty of the sites and the lack of contextual research, partly due to the difficulty of definition and development of protection and management for them.

In the following are a few examples of sites, which have been assessed in different ways at different times and have been subject to some controversy at the Committee. In some way, each of these nominations can be considered to have been a case that could be argued in favour but also against. It has not been easy to decide where to draw the line to define the outstanding universal value.

Town Hall and Roland, Bremen

This property was first rejected by ICOMOS but deferred by the Committee. In its session of 2004, Committee decided to **inscribe** it on the basis of: criteria iii, iv, vi. OUV can be defined from the points of view of history and art.



The medieval town hall and the Roland statue were presented as an outstanding representation of the civic autonomy and market rights in the Holy Roman Empire. The nomination was first rejected by ICOMOS, in 2003, but in the following discussion at the Committee session, the site was deferred subject to a comparative study. The State Party commissioned four independent specialists to reflect on the different aspects of the nominated property; ICOMOS invited a report from an architectural historian. The town hall was considered to represent an exceptionally well preserved example of a medieval town hall, based on a typical Western European model, originally having its roots in northern Italy. The renovation of the town hall at the end of the 16th century, instead, was an outstanding representation of late Renaissance architecture in western Europe, so-called Weser Renaissance, reflecting European-wide trends in 16th-17th centuries. Bremen is a city of imperial foundation, still maintaining its status as a 'free city state'. The Roland statue is related to Emperor Charlemagne, and the legends and literary heritage derived from this context, such as *Chanson de Roland*, and *Orlando Furioso*.

Problems faced in the inscription: In the first nomination, emphasis was placed on the role of Bremen as a Hansa Town. However, considering that several such towns have already been inscribed, the city of Bremen did not seem to add new features. Another problem was the loss of historic town in bombardments during the Second World War.

In the Thematic Framework, Bremen can be referred to: **Cultural associations:** Human interaction: civic autonomy and market rights; Cultural and symbolic associations: Holy Roman Empire. **Expressions of creativity:** Monument: medieval type of town hall and renovation in Weser Renaissance style.

Kuressaare Fortress, Estonia

The Committee decided to **defer** the property with the proposal that also the value of the historic town should be taken into consideration in an eventual revised nomination. OUV could be examined from the points of view of history and art!



Problems: The World Heritage Committee considered the property fairly modest and expressed concern about the comparative study, which was limited to Scandinavia and the Baltic countries. Concern was also expressed about the restoration of the castle. It was proposed to examine the relationship with the 17th-century town.

Kuressaare is considered a rare and well-preserved example of a medieval fortified bishop's residence, to have survived in the Nordic countries. It is testimony to a history of construction from the 14th to 18th centuries, and has a fortification in Vauban style. The castle is an example of a typology established by the Teutonic Order. The historic town of

Kuressaare was built on a 17th-century town plan. Originally, the nomination included only the castle and fortress. Subsequently, after a proposal by ICOMOS, the State Party agreed to extend the buffer zone so as to cover the town. However, the State did not wish to include the town in the nominated core zone.

In the Thematic Framework, Kuressaare can be referred to: **Cultural associations:** Human interaction in society: testimony to Christianisation process; **Expressions of creativity:** Monument: medieval bishop's residence Vauban type fortress; Group of buildings: 17th century Nordic town

Renaissance monumental ensembles of Úbeda and Baeza, Spain

The nomination was rejected by ICOMOS twice, in 1989 and in 2000, considering that the Renaissance sites in Italy were far more representative. The nomination was presented a third time and **inscribed** in 2003 on the basis of criteria ii and iv. OUV can be defined from the point of view history and art.



Problems: The main problem in the first nominations was that reference was made exclusively to the Italian Renaissance. The buildings were considered relatively modest compared to examples in Italy. The condition of historic towns and their contexts was not considered good.

The 16th-century examples of architectural and urban design in Úbeda and Baeza were instrumental in introducing the Renaissance ideas to Spain. Through the publications of Andréa Vandelvira, the principal project architect, these examples were also diffused to Latin America. The central areas of Úbeda and Baeza can thus be considered to constitute outstanding early examples of Renaissance civic architecture and urban planning in Spain in the early 16th century.

In the Thematic Framework Úbeda and Baeza can refer to: **Cultural associations:** Human interaction in society; International influences in Renaissance; **Expressions of creativity:** Monuments and Groups of buildings: (civic and religious buildings): Early Renaissance architecture in Spain (Vandelvira) and early reference to Renaissance architecture in Latin America

St. Kilda

In 1986, ICOMOS supported the inscription of St. Kilda on the basis of cultural criterion v. However, the Committee decided to inscribe the property as a natural site. In 2004, the site was repropoed for extension and the inclusion of the cultural criteria. The Committee

approved the extension, but **deferred** the possibility of cultural criteria. OUV could be referred to: historical, aesthetic, and ethnological points of view.



Problems: Apparently, the case of cultural inscription was not sufficient. The definition of 'extreme conditions of life' was doubted by the WH Committee. The comparative study was not sufficient (compared to North-European examples). Attention in the nomination was laid mainly on the Village, rebuilt in the 19th century.

In terms of culture, the outstanding universal value of St. Kilda is considered to be in bearing exceptional testimony to a way of life and economy based particularly on the products of birds, which developed over more than two millennia. As a result of this development, St. Kilda developed into a cultural landscape, which is rather unique taking into account its spectacular natural setting.

In the Thematic Framework, St Kilda can relate to: **Cultural associations:** Human interaction in society; Testimony to way of life and economy; **Utilisation of natural resources:** Agriculture and food production; Life and economy based on bird products; Unique cultural landscape

Provins, town of medieval fairs

The nomination of the upper town was rejected by ICOMOS at first and withdrawn by the State Party. The nomination was re-proposed extending the area to the whole fortified town. It was **inscribed** by the Committee on the basis of criteria ii and iv. OUV relates to history and science.

Problems: The property represents a relatively modest architecture compared with other French monuments. Therefore several French specialists were doubtful about the inscription. The historic research, however, confirmed the historic importance of this town, which was built in function of the international fairs. It thus forms an urban archaeological testimony, which has relatively little restored compared with other French cities. The emphasis on cultural tourism may have been one of the problems.

The fortified medieval town of Provins is situated in the former territory of the powerful Counts of Champagne. It bears witness to early developments in the organization of international trading fairs and the wool industry. The urban structure of Provins, which was built specifically to host the fairs and related activities, has been well preserved.

In the Thematic Framework, Provins can related to: **Cultural associations:** Human interaction in society; trading; **Expressions of creativity:** Groups of buildings; Medieval trading town; **Utilisation of natural resources:** Systems of manufacturing; Wool

production, water works; **Movement of peoples:** Routes and systems of transportation; Early testimony to development of international fairs; **Development of technologies:** Wool production and water works.

ICOMOS Gaps Report: Action Plan

The five key aims presented in the ICOMOS Action Plan are:

1. Achieve credible Tentative Lists
2. Optimise the success of WH nominations
3. Make the new Operational Guidelines operational
4. Achieve sustainable WH properties
5. Raise awareness of the WH Convention

Actions required to achieve these aims:

Strong partnerships between States Parties, the World Heritage Centre and the Advisory Bodies should be linked to well structured programmes with well-defined outcomes. The scope of the programme is to facilitate the States Parties in their contribution to the development of a World Heritage List that may better reflect the cultural identity, significances and relevance of properties in defined regions of the world. The principal challenges in the action plan are related to the strategies to adopt for collaboration in the development and revision of the Tentative Lists, considering that the revision of the Tentative Lists are the basis for introducing any change in the representivity of the World Heritage List.