

# **INTERNATIONAL DAY FOR MONUMENTS AND SITES**

## **18th APRIL 2007**

On the proposal of ICOMOS, 18 April was designated as The International Day for Monuments and Sites by UNESCO in 1982. For several years now, ICOMOS suggests a topic to be highlighted on this occasion, among the multiple dimensions which make up the vast subject that is the cultural heritage we care for. This has allowed our members and our committees to hold activities, conferences, colloquia or other events to raise awareness on this cultural heritage among the public, the owners or the public authorities by linking a global theme to local or national realities. In recent years, the themes for 18th April have encompassed a wide-range of issues such as historic villages; 20th century heritage; underwater cultural heritage; earthen architecture and the heritage of production.

### **The sites...**

2007 will mark the 25th anniversary of this International Day and the 35th birthday of the World Heritage Convention. It seems important to take advantage of this occasion to dedicate the International Day for Monuments and Sites to a major current issue and on which ICOMOS and its members should reflect together with their scientific and professional partners. We thus propose that we further examine the concept of "sites" - one of ICOMOS' central concerns. Article 3. of our statutes defines them as follows: "All topographical areas and landscapes, the works of man or the combined works of nature and of man, including historic parks and gardens, which are of value from the archaeological, historical, aesthetic, ethnological or anthropological point of view". The World Heritage Convention speaks of "works of man or the combined works of nature and man, and areas including archaeological sites which are of outstanding universal value from the historical, aesthetic, ethnological or anthropological point of view".

### **Theme 2007: Cultural landscapes and monuments of nature**

For 18 April 2007, the Executive Committee, following discussion during the Advisory Committee, therefore proposes the theme of "Cultural landscapes and monuments of nature" to enable all of ICOMOS to contribute to the better recognition, protection and enhancement of the human, cultural, symbolic and memorial dimensions of landscapes or phenomena which are described as "natural" neglecting their important cultural components, both tangible or intangible.

Spaces which bear witness to the past or living spaces, landscapes are shaped through the continuity of traditions, rites or beliefs, through physical interventions; through works of science and art or by memories captured in narratives associated to them. Their heritage dimension is expressed by place names; traces left by past societies; their spatial organisation or in vernacular buildings, as well as in the social or cultural ecosystems which shaped them and on the basis of which they still evolve. They testify of centuries of agricultural activity or more recent industrial activity, even to wars which also left their mark on the ground. The fruit of human perception, qualified by our cultures to which comes added our scientific knowledge,

landscapes all carry cultural dimensions, some associated with bodies of knowledge, traditions or ideas which give them a symbolic or sacred character, even an importance in certain artistic productions or as historical references, which need to be recognized to better guide the conservation and protection of this living heritage.

As for monuments of nature, they also carry cultural dimensions, often very important ones. Throughout the world, rocks, mountains, capes or other geological formations have been used for rituals, as landmarks, or inspired artists, navigators and legends. Their personality, or the place they occupy in a tradition or a village, make certain trees, even certain forests, true cultural monuments. The traditions and architecture associated with springs or rivers are extremely diversified. One could also consider the importance of volcanoes or winds in the history and heritage which is associated with them.

The improved recognition of this heritage dimension of landscapes and monuments of nature has been translated into a great diversity of protection and conservation practices - traditional or recent. In some places, monuments of nature are listed, such as remarkable trees in Japan or Vancouver or the Syri and Kalter springs, known as the Blue Eye, in Albania. In others, measures are put into place to assert the cultural dimension of agriculture as a way of creating landscapes. Elsewhere, sacred rocks, forests or woods are recognized for their cultural values, sometimes universal, as in the case of Uluru-Kata Tjuta in Australia, or the sacred forest of Osun Oshogbo in Nigeria. This reality shows how desirable it is to bring the scientific disciplines and cultural heritage closer together rather than to perpetuate the exclusion of the cultural dimension.

We thus call upon you to seize the occasion of 18 April 2007 to promote these cultural dimensions of landscapes and monuments of nature by organizing activities which highlight them to the general public and the authorities in charge of their protection. It would be extremely useful that you inform us of examples, practices and tools - traditions, laws or inventories, for example - which protect and preserve this heritage. Lastly, we hope to receive your input in preparation of a set of ICOMOS guidelines on cultural landscapes and monuments of nature.

### **Theme 2008: Religious heritage and sacred places**

Furthermore, following resolutions by the General Assembly and the interest expressed by several Committees and members, the Executive Committee has chosen "Religious heritage and sacred places" as the 2008 theme for the International Day for Monuments and Sites. A universally present dimension, religious practices and beliefs have led human societies to mark their spaces, build places, carry out works or build up archives loaded with meaning and memories making it one of the most important components of the heritage in today's world. This theme expresses itself in landscapes through place names, or rites and pilgrimages linked to certain natural elements. In addition, in creating this heritage, many past and current societies brought together the sum of all their arts and sciences in the construction of large or modest buildings and the objects they include.

Nowadays, the conservation of this heritage in its heritage dimension can constitute a major challenge for a community. This raises the need to share experiences; for

example, that of the Quebec Religious Heritage Foundation in Canada, an innovative model of interdenominational dialogue, which carried out a vast programme (more than 200 million US dollars in 10 years) to restore places of worship and works of art and to adapt such buildings for shared uses, based on ICOMOS principles. At a time when religion is increasingly being recognized by the international community as being one of the major issues for decades to come, the 18 April 2008 will be the occasion for ICOMOS members and committees to take stock of the various dimensions of knowledge, conservation and presentation of this vast heritage. It also offers an opportunity to establish links with the authorities who own or administer places of worship and to enlist their support for ICOMOS and its principles. In preparation for 18 April 2008, we thus invite you to devise activities and joint events - for example, with the religious authorities responsible for these heritage places - to identify examples of practices or achievements worthy of sharing with your colleagues world-wide to reinforce conservation action, our foremost mission.

In conclusion, we therefore invite you to make use of these two themes - Cultural landscapes and monuments of nature for 18 April 2007 and Religious heritage and sacred places for 18 April 2008 - to establish cooperation with a public or municipal administration, a university, a school or with other associations to build bridges and initiate dialogues which will help us to communicate ICOMOS' concerns to the users of, those responsible for or researchers working on cultural landscapes, natural heritage or sacred places.

We thank you in advance for all your initiatives and ask you to inform the ICOMOS Secretariat, as early as possible, of the activities you plan to undertake for 18 April, but also to share their results with us (programme, participation, declarations, and publications). This will help us to disseminate information and to gather conclusions on all your activities, so as to be able to testify of the vitality of ICOMOS' network.

**Dinu Bumbaru**  
**Secretary General of ICOMOS**

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