ICOMOS Charters on cultural tourism throughout the 50 years of the UNESCO World Heritage Convention

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Abstract
This paper outlines the contribution of the ICOMOS International Scientific Committee on Cultural Tourism (ICTC) to tourism management throughout the history of the UNESCO Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Natural and Cultural Heritage (1972) and traces the evolution of international standard-setting texts on tourism brought forward by ICOMOS. It presents the draft International Charter for Cultural Heritage Tourism - Reinforcing cultural heritage protection and community resilience through responsible and sustainable tourism management (2021). Its new principles are formulated to address challenges of our time, instigate change, improve practice, guide future cultural tourism development and support adaptive and responsive visitor management supporting a more resilient future.

Keywords
Cultural Heritage Tourism, ICOMOS, UNESCO, Charter.

1. Tourism in the evolution of the 1972 Convention and ICOMOS Charters

The post- World War 2 period saw the establishment of organisations supporting recovery and peaceful coexistence through education, culture, and heritage. Among these organisations were the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) with its cultural conventions and Advisory Bodies. Its Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Natural and Cultural Heritage (1972) is regarded as its flagship Convention. Sites inscribed on the World Heritage List, recognised for their Outstanding Universal Value (OUV), soon became the focus of tourist interest. With improved standards of life, technological advancements and more accessible long haul travel, tourism developed into a globalised industry with cultural heritage sites as valuable attractions.

The first 12 sites were inscribed onto the World Heritage List in 1978. The extent to which the World Heritage Committee was concerned with the potential impacts of visitors at the time is unknown due to the lack of systematic research on this topic. The Convention was primarily a mechanism for the identification, protection and conservation of exceptional heritage and the first versions of its Operational Guidelines did not mention

tourism or visitors. ICOMOS however, was already concerned with the growth in visitor numbers and the potential negative impacts on cultural sites and in response it published its first Cultural Tourism Charter in 1976. The Charter was a result of the first known meeting to gather representatives from the tourism industry and main international organisations dealing with heritage protection[1]. Signed by a large number of institutions, it can be considered the founding document of the international guidance and recommendations on tourism and cultural heritage.

The Charter advocated an approach to tourism focusing on its potential to support the protection and dissemination of heritage through education, awareness raising and media. Bearing in mind that neither UNESCO nor the World Tourism Organisation (WTO) had issued any policies on these subjects at the time, the 1978 Charter became one of the main references for subsequent recommendations and standard-setting documents in this field.

The interest in and concern about the impacts and the management of tourism has evolved since that time. The seminal report 'Our Common Future' (1987) introducing the concept of 'sustainable development'[2] was soon followed up with definitions of 'sustainable tourism'. In 1993 a UNESCO UNEP study showed that most managers of natural World Heritage sites regarded tourism as a key issue concerning the protection of heritage and sustainability[3]. *Cultural Tourism: Tourism at World Heritage Sites: the Site Manager's Handbook* by ICOMOS ICTC was published in the same year[4].

In 1999 ICOMOS adopted the *International Cultural Tourism Charter - Managing Tourism at Places of Heritage Significance*. It became an essential document for highlighting the potential of tourism as a form of intercultural collaboration and exchange. It demanded tourism collaboration in the protection of heritage, underlining the dynamic dimension of the relationship between tourism and heritage, and raised awareness on the effects of globalisation. The Charter defended cultural diversity and local identity ahead of the adoption of the 2005 *Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions.* It was formative due to: i) its vision of the diverse dimensions of "sustainability", ii) its focus on communities, and iii) its pioneering attention to visitor experience as an important awareness-raising aspect within the context of cultural heritage sustainability, carrying capacity and limits of acceptable change. The Charter set a precedent by interlinking these aspects, which remain fundamental in today's standard setting texts.

The Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention did not address visitor management before 1999. In order to preserve the integrity of cultural sites, particularly those open to large numbers of visitors, nominations were encouraged to include in their management section "Agreed plans related to property (e.g., regional, local plan, conservation plan, tourism development plan)" and to identify "visitor/tourism pressures" among the factors affecting the sites[5]. However, no specific guidance was provided until 2005 and particularly 2011, when the Guidelines were updated to include management measures, plans and indicators on tourism.

In 2001 the World Heritage Committee in Helsinki (25COM) recognised growing threats on World Heritage sites from tourism which, if sustainably managed, could offer socio-economic development opportunities. At the

Margaret Gowen, Fergus Maclaren, Celia Martínez, Cecilie Smith-Christensen

same time, it adopted the World Heritage Tourism Programme to support training at specific World Heritage sites. Standing out among its contributions was the first volume of the World Heritage Papers series in 2002: *Managing Tourism at World Heritage Sites: a Practical Manual for World Heritage Site Managers,* informed by and including the ICOMOS 1999 Charter in its Annex 2[6].

The years that followed saw some changes that would strongly influence implementation of the Convention including efforts related to tourism. In 2007, the importance of enhancing the role of communities in implementation of the Convention was recognised by adding a '5th C' (communities) to its strategic objectives (WHC-07/31.COM/13B). The same year, the 16th General Assembly of States Parties to the World Heritage Convention first addressed climate change through the *Policy Document on the Impacts of Climate Change on World Heritage Properties* (WHC-07/16.GA/10)[7].

In 2010 in Brasilia, the World Heritage Committee adopted the policy guidelines *Defining the relationship between World Heritage and sustainable tourism* (34COM 5F.2.4)[8]. This was the first to address the responsibilities of the different actors in World Heritage and tourism including the Committee, the Advisory Bodies, the WHC, States Parties, property managers and the tourism sector.

The same year an evaluation of the 2001 Programme[9] led to its conclusion by the Committee asking the World Heritage Centre to convene a new and inclusive programme (34COM 5F.2). The current World Heritage and Sustainable Tourism Programme was adopted by the Committee in 2012 at its meeting in Saint Petersburg (36COM 5E). The programme focuses on the shared responsibility for conservation of our common cultural and natural heritage for sustainable development through appropriate tourism management. It advocates enhancing awareness and participation of all stakeholders to protect the properties and their OUV. The Programme supports capacity building, offers policy guidance and strategic support, and through its Sustainable Tourism Toolkit provides advice and resources including 'How To' guides and the Visitor Management Assessment & Strategy Tools (VMAST) as practical resources supporting site management authorities[10].

But guidance on tourism still remains insufficiently integrated into formal mechanisms within the Convention. The current Operational Guidelines (2021) and required nomination format (Op.G. Annex 5)[11] do address the need to limit the negative impacts of tourism: Section 4b seeks identification of factors that may negatively impact sites, including tourism development; section 4.b (iii) focuses on visitor numbers, carrying capacity and how management will deal with and prevent adverse effects and pressures; and section 5.h focuses on visitor facilities and infrastructure, interpretation and presentation. The Operational Guidelines also requests State Parties to develop Heritage Impact Assessments (according to the Guidance developed by the Advisory Bodies)[12]. While more detailed than in the past, there is still no formal requirement for tourism management plans in nominations or after inscription. While focus on tourism has improved, including a dedicated chapter in Periodic Reporting[13] requesting information on tourism activities and visitor management, the formal mechanisms of the Convention remain of limited use in proactive and adaptive tourism and visitor management.

2. The International Charter for Cultural Heritage Tourism 2021: An ICOMOS Charter for the future

As an Advisory Body to the World Heritage Committee, ICOMOS provides advice and makes recommendations

on all matters related to cultural and mixed heritage, including the evaluation and monitoring of the state of conservation of inscribed properties. In this role, ICOMOS expert members, guided by the ICTC Charters, deal first-hand with the effects of tourism on the preservation of the sites and their communities, and offer recommendations to the States Parties and the World Heritage Committee. The Committee is expected to make decisions based on these recommendations.

The 1976 and 1999 Charters remain critically relevant. However, the growth in tourism has negatively impacted heritage values and challenges implementation of the Convention. The economic growth approach has led to unsustainable commercial use of heritage and significant acquisition by international corporations to the detriment of local people. It has also led to tourism-dependent communities and reduced resilience through less diverse local economies. The climate crisis is affecting fragile tourism destinations and the entire planet.

Honouring its responsibility as an Advisory Body and aiming to address new and emerging challenges, ICOMOS and the ICTC decided to update the 1999 Charter. The process took place during a period of profound disruption caused by Covid-19 exacerbated by the Climate Emergency resulting in a new document: the draft *ICOMOS International Charter for Cultural Heritage Tourism 2021: reinforcing cultural heritage protection and community resilience through responsible and sustainable tourism management*[14.] The ICTC task-force has focused on how the new Charter should contribute beyond existing standard-setting texts, seeking for an alternative to the extractive economic growth paradigm.

The objectives and principles of the Charter are included in table 1:

Objective 1 - To place the protection of cultural heritage and community rights at the heart of cultural heritage tourism policy and projects, by providing principles that will inform responsible tourism planning and management for cultural heritage protection, community resilience and adaptation;

Objective 2 - To promote stakeholder collaboration and participatory governance in the stewardship of cultural heritage and management of tourism, applying a people-centered and rights-based approach, emphasizing access, education and enjoyment;

Objective 3 - To guide cultural heritage and tourism management in supporting the UN Sustainable Development Goals and Climate Action policy.

Principle 1: Place cultural heritage protection and conservation at the centre of responsible cultural tourism planning and management;

Principle 2: Manage tourism at cultural heritage places through management plans informed by monitoring, carrying capacity and other planning instruments;

Principle 3: Enhance public awareness and visitor experience through sensitive interpretation and presentation of cultural heritage;

Principle 4: Recognize and reinforce the rights of communities, Indigenous Peoples and traditional owners by including access and engagement in participatory governance of the cultural and natural heritage commons used in tourism;

Principle 5: Raise awareness and reinforce cooperation for cultural heritage conservation among all stakeholders involved in tourism;

Principle 6: Increase the resilience of communities and cultural heritage through capacity development, risk assessment, strategic planning and adaptive management;

Principle 7: Integrate climate action and sustainability measures in the management of cultural tourism and cultural heritage.

Formulated in the context of the 2030 Agenda, the climate emergency[15], overtourism and disruptions experienced during the Covid-19 pandemic, the Charter introduces a number of concepts not previously mentioned in ICOMOS Charters. Most importantly, it stands up to the exploitation of heritage allowed by the notion of heritage as an economic resource either as a 'property' of a few or a "free for all" public good. Instead, it seeks to contribute transformative change by considering heritage as 'commons' to be stewarded and governed[16] for the shared benefit and enjoyment of the whole community. The Charter promotes a rights based approach through the principle of participative governance, and states that the sustainability and resilience of communities and heritage conservation is intrinsically dependent on the carrying capacity of heritage sites and destinations.

As the tourism industry is recovering after global lock downs and travel restrictions, the ICTC shares a concern about the rapid return to 'business as usual'. For this reason the Charter goes beyond sustaining tourism to advocate responsible planning, management and practice in the face of climate change and future warned and yet unforeseen disruptions. It addresses all stakeholders stressing that "The responsible management of tourism is a shared responsibility of governments, tour operators, tourism businesses, destination managers and marketing organisations, site management authorities, land-use planners, heritage and tourism professionals, civil society and visitors" (Preamble). The Charter is the first ICOMOS standard-setting text that addresses these interrelated issues. By exposing and articulating blindspots in current approaches, it seeks to empower practitioners and improve practice through the application of its principles.

3. Conclusions

Tourism development and visitor management will remain one of the main challenges for implementation of the Convention in the next 50 years. From its inception and the inscription of the first sites on the World Heritage List, site management authorities and communities have struggled to manage the dynamics of tourism. Many World Heritage nominations are made with the intention of using tourism as an economic lever for local community development and to support the rationale for funding for conservation of cultural heritage. The mechanisms of the Convention, including the Operational Guidelines, Periodic Reporting and Reactive Monitoring, have increasingly dealt with tourism and visitor management especially in the effort to balance heritage protection and development.

As an Advisory Body, ICOMOS aspires to lead improvements in professional practice and site management through its standard setting instruments. While the values underpinning the 1976 and 1999 Charters remain, the ICOMOS Cultural Heritage Tourism Charter 2021 aims to *reinforce cultural heritage protection and enhance community resilience through responsible and sustainable tourism management.* In doing so it stands up to the extractive economic growth paradigm used in tourism by advocating the consideration of cultural heritage as 'commons' belonging to all, to be stewarded and governed through broad-based participation and for the shared benefit of current and future generations. As such, the Charter argues for a change in approach that will have a bearing on practice orientation and future policy formulation. The Charter is a contribution by ICOMOS to be considered alongside the relevant recommendations and resources provided by UNESCO, IUCN and ICCROM as well as other relevant organisations.

The way in which cultural tourism is addressed as a driver of sustainable development will be crucial for the Convention's future relevance. Looking forward, the ICOMOS ICTC has recognised that the way in which tourism at World Heritage sites has been conducted over the past 50 years needs substantial reconsideration. The 2021 ICOMOS Charter offers and advocates an updated approach that will require individual as well as organisational courage, leadership and collaboration.

[1] The Charter was the result of the International Seminar on Contemporary Tourism and Humanism, Brussels 8-9 November 1976. It was signed by ICOMOS itself, the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), the International Union of Architects (UIA), Europa Nostra, the European Travel Commission (ETC), the World Tourism Organisation (WTO) and many others. https://www.icomosictc.org/p/1976-icomos-cultural-tourism-charter.html

[2] Report of the World Commission on Environment and Development: Our Common Future (1987) https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/5987our-common-future.pdf

[3] UNITED NATIONS ENVIRONMENT PROGRAMME. *Managing tourism in natural World Heritage Sites*: report of the international workshop held in Dakar, Senegal, 22-26 November 1993, Paris, UNEP Industry and Environment Office, UNESCO World Heritage Centre, 1994.

[4] Produced within the framework of the ICOMOS 10th General Assembly and International Symposium in Sri Lanka, 1993. https://www.icomos.org/fr?option=com_content&view=article&id=296:isc-cultural-tourism&catid=116:publications

[5] Op.G.1999, 24(b) (ii), 6-7; 17

[6] ARTHUR PEDERSEN, *Managing Tourism at World Heritage Sites: a Practical Manual for World Heritage Site Managers,* World Heritage Papers No.1, Paris, UNESCO, 2002.

[7] UNESCO WORLD HERITAGE CENTRE, *Policy Document on the Impacts of Climate Change on World Heritage Properties,* Paris, UNESCO, 2008

[8] https://whc.unesco.org/en/tourism/4 COM 5F.2

[9] WHC-10/34.COM/INF.5F.3

[10] https://whc.unesco.org/en/tourism/

[11] https://whc.unesco.org/en/guidelines/

[12] UNESCO, ICCROM, ICOMOS and IUCN, *Guidance and Toolkit for Impact Assessments in a World Heritage Context,* Paris, UNESCO, 2022. https://whc.unesco.org/en/resourcemanuals/

[13] https://whc.unesco.org/en/periodicreporting/

[14] https://www.icomosictc.org/

[15] ICOMOS declared a Climate Emergency in 2020: https://www.icomos.org/en/focus/climate-change/85740-icomos-declares-a-climate-emergency

[16] Building on the work of Elinor Ostrom on Governing the Commons for which she was awarded the Nobel Memorial Award on Economic Sciences 2009 and later contributions.