Proposed Joint Workshop of ICOMOS Cultural Tourism and Heritage Interpretation Committees during the ICOMOS General Assembly, 2008

Quebec 29 September 2008

Background

The proposed Workshop will be the first formal meeting between the two ICOMOS International Scientific Committees that focus on the relationship between the conservation of heritage places, the visitor experience and best practice management of tourism to heritage places.

The primary Objective of the Workshop is to explore areas of mutual interest and to develop complementary programme initiatives in response to the emerging cooperation between UNESCO World Heritage Centre (UNESCO WHC) and UN World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO) particularly in regard to two major and current programme initiatives:

- The development of Working Principles for Sustainable Tourism at WH Sites
- The Integration of Heritage Interpretation with the entire Tourism Experience

These two projects are of considerable interest to both Committees’ missions and objectives and can form a valuable basis for cooperation.

ICOMOS International Cultural Tourism Committee (ICTC)

The Mission of ICTC is to promote the responsible management of sustainable tourism activities at natural and cultural heritage places and sites, including historic towns, cultural landscapes, archaeological sites, galleries, museums, moveable and intangible heritage associated with heritage sites to better protect the heritage values and communicate those values to the host community, visitors and other relevant stakeholders.

ICOMOS International Committee on Interpretation and Presentation of Cultural Heritage Sites (ICIP).

The main task of ICIP is to study the evolving technologies and techniques of public interpretation and presentation, evaluating their potential to enrich contemporary historical discourse and to heighten sensitivity to the universal values and particular modes of human expression embodied in cultural heritage sites. ICIP stresses the importance of productive involvement of all stakeholders and associated communities in the development and implementation of interpretive programs. The work of ICIP explicitly focuses on the experiential dimension of visits to cultural heritage sites, particularly by means of various media and methods of public communication.

Opportunities for ICIP/ICTC Resource Sharing and Cooperation

A number of major and mutually reinforcing initiatives have emerged from UNESCO WHC, UNWTO, and ICOMOS ICTC in recent months that provide opportunities for the two ISCs to work together:

- Recognition that no World Heritage Site can be managed, protected and conserved successfully without particular attention being given to developing sustainable tourism policies and programmes.
- Recognition that conservation commitments must come first in our associations with heritage management regimes and the heritage tourism industry.
• Recognition that interpretation of the meaning of World Heritage Sites is inherently important to the conservation process, and therefore plays a defining role in conservation/tourism interactions.

• Recognition that, within sustainable tourism policies and programmes, the arbiters of value, those who influence varying definitions of meaning and significance, are members of the concerned communities themselves.

• Recognition that tourism can and must be turned from an exploiter of heritage places to an active contributor for conservation of the heritage values and the communities that sustain them.

• Recognition by UNESCO WHC and its major advisory bodies, ICOMOS, IUCN and ICCROM, that there are many common objectives, approaches and methodologies in the development of sustainable tourism policies and programmes for WHS of cultural, natural and mixed heritage values.

• Recognition that the management of WHS must take regard of a wide variety of factors well beyond the boundaries of the WHS, extending right back through the tourism supply chain to the provision of the information that encourages someone to decide to eventually visit the particular site.

• Recognition of the potential for Heritage Interpretation to be integrated into the entire tourism supply chain as part of the process of developing sound and influential tourism policies.

Two initiatives, in particular, can serve as potential platforms for cooperation and collaboration between ICTC and ICIP:

1.) **UNESCO WHC/UNWTO Sustainable Tourism at WH Sites Project**

International and domestic tourism are growing at an exponential rate and now represent one of the most powerful economic and social activities in both developed and developing countries. World Heritage Sites (WHS) represent the pinnacle of the world’s natural and cultural sites but are also some of the most attractive and seductive tourism attractions. The challenge is how to make tourism activity a positive contributor to the protection, conservation and presentation of heritage sites and the communities that sustain them.

This year-and-a half long initiative will generate common tourism working principals for WH sites that can be adopted by the tourism industry and used to guide WH tourism interventions by the WH Centre, the WH advisory bodies, and the WH Committee. Key partnerships within the tourism industry will be developed with pledged commitments to follow these principles.

2.) **The Integration of Heritage Interpretation with the Tourism Experience**

UNWTO, with the support of Japanese funding through the World Bank and in conjunction with UNESCO WHC, has commissioned the preparation of a major new Handbook to expand and reposition the role of Heritage Interpretation within the entire Tourism Experience chain. This is a significant outcome from the principle that tourism management at natural and cultural heritage sites cannot be confined to the physical, historical or legal boundaries of the actual site.

The Handbook draft text is to be completed during 2008. Its preparation provides a useful point of coalescence between the interests of the two ICOMOS ISCs.
The overall Tourism Experience begins when someone decides on a future journey or vacation that will include a visit to that site. The image of the site and expectations for a future visit that determine an individual travel choice commence a Tourism Experience chain that will continue through the journey, the arrival at the nearby Destination and then on the Site itself.

The Heritage Interpretation process, traditionally confined to activities within the heritage site, needs to be expanded and become fully integrated into the entire Tourism Experience. Only in this manner will it fully contribute to the development of sustainable tourism both at the heritage site and in the contemporary community that sustains that site.

The Terms of Reference for the Handbook are:

To develop a handbook and manual on how to integrate interpretation, orientation and communication techniques and activities on natural and cultural heritage in tourism development and management processes. The handbook will target (i) policy makers and practitioners dealing with the management of heritage sites and features, (ii) tourism professionals in the public and private sector, (iii) training and development institutions assisting heritage management and tourism development processes.

Interpretation and communication of heritage values in tourism can serve multiple purposes in ensuring the long term sustainability of this activity and the heritage assets it depends on:

1. Raising awareness on heritage values among tourists, thus encouraging their responsible behaviour during visits and their collaboration for conservation efforts
2. Increasing pride and appreciation in host communities for their heritage, thus fostering the preservation of traditions and sustainable use of resources.
3. Creating an added value and high quality learning experience for visitors that will contribute to the competitiveness of related businesses and tourism destinations in general.
4. Ensuring that local communities have a role in determining the appropriate presentation of their cultural values.
5. Creating services and goods using innovative techniques (e.g. guiding, thematic programmes, merchandising, using ICT tools) that will generate revenues for the maintenance and preservation of heritage sites and features.
6. Controlling the high influx of visitors in heavily visited and popular heritage sites, thus reducing negative impacts of tourism.
7. Creating strong tourism products in lesser known and smaller attractions and destinations that will enable a vibrant and varied local tourism sector, based on typical and distinguishing local heritage features.

Tourism is heavily based on the environmental and cultural resources of the destinations, which experience growing pressure due to the constantly increasing volume of tourist arrivals and the geographical spread of this activity. The sustainable use of natural and cultural heritage assets for tourism has become a general concern in this sector, and appropriate policies and management plans are increasingly being developed and implemented at all levels. An integral part of any such strategy should include applying techniques and developing services for appropriate and high quality interpretation and communication of heritage values in tourism. While there have been a wide range of techniques developed and literature published on heritage interpretation, its strategic role and practical application in tourism has not been examined systematically so far. Appropriate interpretation and communication techniques should be considered at early stages of tourism development, in order to become an integral part of high quality tourism programmes. There is a wide range of conventional techniques, modern multimedia and ICT tools that can be applied for heritage interpretation in tourism. A comprehensive guidebook on these approaches and methods will have a practical application for a wide range of users.

In this context, the Interpretation Guidebook was to be quite different from the typical documentary and training material that has been developed over the years by those professionally involved in interpretation at historic and natural sites. It will expand and
reposition Heritage Interpretation and its associated communication of the cultural heritage or natural significance of places from heritage sites, which can be regarded as the end of the entire tourism supply chain, into the very centre of the whole travel experience as visitors move from initial decision making (Demand), to the Destination that supports the Site and thence to the Site itself.

**Invitation to the Joint Committee Meeting**

In light of the great potential for productive collaboration and creative synergy between the two ICOMOS ISCs, we therefore propose this joint workshop of the committees at the 16th ICOMOS General Assembly. We call upon our members to offer suggestions for additional agenda points—and look forward to their participation in the activities in Quebec.

The proposed date for the joint meeting will be the afternoon of 29 September 2008, the day set aside within the General Assembly Programme for the International Scientific Committees.

ICTC and ICIP will then hold their separate Annual Meetings in the late afternoon or early evening, following the joint meeting.

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