

# DRO

Deakin University's Research Repository

**This is the published version**

Buckley, KI 2014, The World Heritage Convention at 40: challenges for the work of ICOMOS, Historic Environment, vol. 26, no. 2, pp. 38-52.

**Available from Deakin Research Online**

<http://hdl.handle.net/10536/DRO/DU:30071524>

Reproduced with the kind permission of the copyright owner

**Copyright:** 2014, Council for the Historic Environment, Australia

PART 1

## Australia and the Global Dialogue in 2012

The World Heritage Convention at 40:  
Challenges for the work of ICOMOS

Kristal Buckley

## Abstract

The marking of the 40th anniversary of the World Heritage Convention in 2012 focused debate about its merits, achievements and impacts. It is commonly said that the World Heritage Convention is UNESCO's 'flagship program' and its 'most successful' convention. As an Advisory Body to the Convention, World Heritage is a prominent part of the identity, mission and activities of ICOMOS worldwide. This paper describes a number of pressing issues concerning the implementation of the World Heritage Convention, and some of the implications of these for ICOMOS in its role as an Advisory Body, and for its global membership.

## Introduction

The text of the *Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage* (World Heritage Convention) was adopted by the UNESCO General Conference on 16 November 1972. It came into operation in 1975, upon reaching the threshold of 20 ratifications, and the first properties were inscribed in the World Heritage List in 1978. The Convention therefore 'turned 40' in 2012, providing an important moment of reflection and evaluation.

This paper describes some of the key themes in this dialogue, and highlights some of the implications for ICOMOS in its role as an Advisory Body, and for its global membership. These reflections predictably look to both the past and the future, and ask whether the original ideals of the Convention are still valid and achievable. While understanding the past is essential, this paper argues for the greater importance of appreciating the opportunities of the *present* in order to find a new focus and effectively use this 40-year-old mechanism for heritage conservation – ways that might depart from the futures imagined by the Convention's 'pioneers', but nevertheless enabling its 'spirit' to continue and find relevance within the changed international context of the present.

This paper is an account that is both personal and institutional (and therefore not especially 'objective'). It is based on the unusual opportunity I have had to participate as a member of the ICOMOS delegation to the World Heritage Committee since 2007. This has been, and continues to be a time of strong scrutiny of the working methods and expertise of ICOMOS, provoking intense reflection and inspiring needed changes – in many ways these are uncomfortable times. ICOMOS, together with IUCN and ICCROM, comprise the three Advisory Bodies to the World Heritage Committee and have very specific roles in the implementation of the World Heritage Convention. The Advisory Bodies are charged by the Convention and its Operational Guidelines to attend the World Heritage Committee sessions, to advise the Committee, and to be as scientific, rigorous and objective as possible in their work (see especially pars. 31–37 and 148 of the *Operational Guidelines*, UNESCO 2013c). There is therefore intense interest in the working



**Figure 1:** The 'view' from the ICOMOS delegation, 35th session of the World Heritage Committee, Paris, 2011. (Source: Kristal Buckley).

methods, language and processes of the Advisory Bodies, the World Heritage Committee, World Heritage Centre – and indeed UNESCO itself (see Brumann 2012; Isar 2011; Meskell 2012).

### **Celebrating a milestone**

Today the merits and impacts of the World Heritage system are the focus of lively debate within the spheres of heritage conservation and heritage studies worldwide. It is commonly said that the World Heritage Convention is UNESCO's 'flagship program' and its 'most successful' convention. It is seen as *the world's most significant heritage conservation agreement* due to its

influence on national heritage systems throughout the world (Cameron & Rössler 2011: 42). Its 'success' is marked by its near-universal participation by the Member States of UNESCO. It is notable for its efforts to join natural and cultural heritage in a single instrument, and as a platform for the exploration of diverse concepts and approaches to heritage and its safeguarding (Bandarin 2013).

While acknowledging these past successes and potential strengths, observers of the World Heritage Committee decision-making sessions such as Meskell (2012, 2013a), Cleere (2011), Cameron (2013), Jokilehto (2011) and von Droste (2011) also express varying levels of alarm about the state of play today and concern about the future. They point to the overload on the system as the World Heritage List grows without an accompanying growth in resources and capacity for conservation, and worry about the potential loss of credibility of the World Heritage List due to perceptions of growing politicisation of decisions. In mapping the growing tendency for the World Heritage Committee to inscribe nominated properties against the recommendations of the Advisory Bodies, these observers see increased promotion (rather than transcending) of national interests. The apparent decline in the influence of experts in the decisions taken is challenging for a system predicated on the centrality of scientific and/or professional knowledge. The cumulative picture provided by these accounts – exacerbated by a dramatic reduction in the financial resources available to UNESCO since 2011 (Bokova 2011) – is that the system was somehow 'better' in the past. In contrast, the future is viewed with pessimism and concern.

Other heritage studies researchers – particularly those writing under the banner of 'critical heritage' – have also taken a sharp look at the claims of 'success' of the World Heritage system. Building on the view most famously expressed by Smith (2006) in her depiction of the role of World Heritage in the promulgation of an 'Authorised Heritage Discourse', these analyses point to the Convention's universalising and eurocentric conceptual framework, the privileging of professional elites at the expense of other voices, and the centrality of the national self-interest of member states in the processes (Harrison 2012; Labadi 2013; Askew 2010; Logan 2013). This perspective is of direct relevance to the role of heritage practitioners in the system, and to the institutional role of ICOMOS. However, there are not many clear directions proposed by these critiques. In the absence of a realistic possibility of altering the text of the World Heritage Convention, we need to work with what we have while addressing these valid critical perspectives.

Against this backdrop of debate, critique and concern, the reflections stimulated by the 40th anniversary of the Convention that occurred in 2012 were important ones. As with the previous decade milestones, the marking of the 40th year of the World Heritage Convention created space for discussion during 2012 about the purposes of World Heritage and its future directions,

situating the system at a 'cross-roads' or even in a 'crisis' due to the pace of activity, and the conditions of overload on the capacity of the World Heritage Committee, World Heritage Centre, Advisory Bodies and States Parties to do their work according to a punishing annual calendar of deadlines (see UNESCO 2013b; Labadi 2013; Terrill *this volume*).

To mark the 40th anniversary of the World Heritage Convention, more than 70 'official' events in 38 countries were held during 2012 (UNESCO 2012), plus many others, including those organised by ICOMOS National Committees around the World Heritage theme selected for the International Day for Monuments and Sites, celebrated on 18 April 2012, and throughout that year (ICOMOS 2012a). There were special books and reports launched during 2012, as well as films, DVDs, calendars, exhibitions, television specials and performances by UNESCO's 'good will ambassadors' such as Herbie Hancock and Sarah Brightman. There has been little opportunity to stop and reflect on these discussions or to absorb them into the work of ICOMOS or the World Heritage system generally – there is a risk that some of the best ideas will be forgotten.

The year-long celebration of the 40th anniversary of the World Heritage Convention was concluded at Kyoto, Japan in November 2012 (UNESCO 2013b). The theme chosen for the 40th birthday celebrations was *World Heritage and Sustainable Development: The role of communities*. This theme mirrors changes to the World Heritage system over its four decades – especially the acute awareness that social and cultural contexts are not peripheral, and that communities are central even though the implementation of the Convention is a transaction between member states.

## Recalling the Past

It seems essential for all organisations to know their past, including the contributions that were made, the key moments and discussions, the breakthroughs and break-downs – indeed the history that explains 'how we got here'. The reflections initiated for the 40th anniversary of the Convention included a good deal of this perspective. Importantly, there is a distinct divide drawn between the past and the present by commentators who have experiences of both. For them, the present is somehow not like the past and there is not a smooth narrative from the beginning until now. For example, in their important book on the oral history of the earlier decades of the World Heritage system, 'Voices of the Pioneers', Cameron and Rössler (2013) draw a line at the year 2000, the year the World Heritage Committee last met in Australia and considered a substantial reform agenda. Beyond that line lay the complexities of the present and another, yet to be written account.

As the new millennium dawned, the high-minded ideals that inspired the initial vision for World Heritage were under pressure and the need for renewed commitment was evident. (Cameron & Rössler 2013: 221)

At Kyoto, Cameron gave a thoughtful overview of the history of World Heritage (Cameron 2013). She pointed to the extraordinary international dialogue that has occurred, and the global impact of ideas introduced through World Heritage. She highlighted the expansion of definitions of 'heritage', the increased recognition of cultural diversity, and the ways in which new tools and international cooperation helped to start conservation at national levels. She also described a 'creeping politicisation' from the mid-1990s, the failure to live up to the promises of technical and financial assistance to places and communities that needed it, the many pressures, and the tensions between national sovereignty and shared international interests. Cameron concluded by calling for us all to commit to the 'rejuvenation' of the World Heritage Convention, mentioning the many people engaged in World Heritage, and its still positive and powerful message.

Bernd von Droste, the founding Director of the World Heritage Centre also delineated the present from the past in his presentation to the Kyoto program, describing four different stages following the beginning of the operation of the Convention in 1978 (von Droste 2011, 2013).

- The first – from 1978 to 1991 – was the ‘expert phase’, focused on building the List, encouraging more countries to join the Convention, and setting up the processes. At the end of this phase, there were 359 properties on the World Heritage List, and 127 States Parties had joined the Convention (von Droste 2011: 32). During this phase he says that it was relatively rare for decisions taken by the World Heritage Committee to significantly differ from the advice of the Advisory Bodies.
- The second – from 1992 to 1999 – was the ‘phase of integration or consolidation’. It was marked by the establishment of the World Heritage Centre, the adoption of the new category of ‘cultural landscape’, concerns about the ‘balance’ of the List and the development of the Global Strategy, the drafting of the Nara Document on Authenticity, the introduction of formal monitoring processes, and a greater focus on public information, education and engagement. The celebration of the 20th anniversary of the Convention generated a process of review, and there was increased attention to tourism and education as functions of the implementation of the Convention (Pressouyre 1996).
- The third stage – from 2000 to 2005 – was the ‘phase of political correctness’, with a stronger concern about imbalance and representivity, the introduction of Periodic Reporting and statements of Outstanding Universal Value, and a stronger emphasis on management plans. This stage ended with major revisions to the Operational Guidelines, producing the system in use today (more or less).
- And the fourth phase – including the present – is the ‘phase of overload’ for all of the key organisations, a phase where the Committee has become dominated more by diplomats than heritage ‘experts’, the first de-listings have occurred, there are growing concerns about climate change and sustainability, and there is a recognition of the need to build a global civic culture.

This formulation by von Droste is interesting because while he traces most of the current ‘challenges’ to earlier phases (and some were evident even at the first 10-year milestone), the past is more positively portrayed than the present, and by implication, the future. There is therefore some urgency about taking action to resolve the confronting issues of the present.

## **Living in the Present – the 40th year of the Convention**

In marking the 40th anniversary, there were many life cycle analogies drawn, including questions about whether the problems of the present are akin to a mid-life crisis for World Heritage. The global discussions seem to ask if we – in particular the organisations that support the system – have lost our way, and failed to live up to the earlier ideals? Is there a crisis? Or, are the characteristics of the present merely symptoms of the successes of World Heritage, its power and authority, and its brand?

Kishore Rao (2013), the Director of the World Heritage Centre, said in Kyoto that ‘life begins at 40’ – but we begin to take better care of our health, and consider what is most important. Drawing on the positive possibilities of the ‘middle age’ analogy, Sheridan Burke at the Australia ICOMOS Sydney symposium said that:

If life begins to be better in middle age, the next decades of implementing the World Heritage Convention should see a remarkable consolidation of its achievements, given our now extraordinary access to instantaneous communication exchange, the rapid spread of ratification of the Convention and the increasing number of listed sites from whose conservation experience we can learn. (Burke 2012: 1)

The events of the 2012 session of the World Heritage Committee, held in St Petersburg in the Russian Federation, added to this sense of taking stock. Many commentators have noted that a relatively large proportion of the nominations that were assessed as ‘not yet ready’ for inscription by the Advisory Bodies were nevertheless inscribed by the World Heritage Committee, particularly in the sessions held in 2010, 2011 and 2012 (Shadie 2012; Meskell

2012, 2013a; Rodwell 2012). In the discussions of the State of Conservation of World Heritage properties, there was vigorous debate about how much restraint should be placed on development, especially in developing countries, and against the technical advice provided by the Advisory Bodies and the World Heritage Centre (Meskell 2011, 2014). As mentioned earlier, these trends are generally read and referred to as signs of increased politicisation of World Heritage processes, a backlash against eurocentrism, and reduced respect for expertise generally and the authority of the Advisory Bodies in particular. Overall, there was a sense that the balance had shifted to give greater weight to national interests in the decisions taken.

The reflections stimulated by the 40th birthday of the Convention mostly seemed to anchor the desirable futures in the key principles of the past, a return to its foundational 'spirit'. Yet it is also worth asking whether these ideas, crafted in the west in the 1960s, are entirely relevant or motivating as the Convention moves into its fifth decade?

From an ICOMOS perspective, the shift in the way the work of the Advisory Bodies is received and used is evident and continuing. There are contradictory messages being sent to ICOMOS and IUCN. On one hand they are asked to maintain the highest standard of 'scientific' rigour and to support a World Heritage List predicated on the exclusivity of its 'branding' powers. On the other, there are frustrations because the Advisory Bodies cannot act in a greater spirit of collaboration with States Parties to achieve their expanding World Heritage goals (Cleere 2011; Meskell 2014). At the local level, heritage practitioners, site managers and communities look to the Advisory Bodies for more support, advice and resources. There are many reasons for these shifts and the mixed messages, reflecting geo-political currents of today's world and the changing roles of experts in the larger sense (Schofield 2014).

The profile of the World Heritage 'brand' and the complexity of the processes needed to attain it mean that there is a great deal of investment of social, political and financial capital in inscription on the World Heritage List by the time the World Heritage Committee meets each year to take the formal decisions. Is it any wonder that no State Party is prepared for anything other than 'yes'? Lynn Meskell of Stanford University has described this as *the rush to inscribe* (Meskell 2012).

Although the 1000th inscription on the World Heritage List – the natural World Heritage property of Okavango in Botswana – has now been achieved, there is no sign that the appetite for listing will soon abate. In April 2014, there were 1659 properties on the Tentative Lists of 177 States Parties (Member States), representing a theoretical backlog of *at least* a further 40 years. In practical terms, the largest of the current Tentative Lists – such as India (55), Turkey (54), Iran (52), China (48), Italy (41), France (38) or Egypt (32) – will themselves take several decades to submit and evaluate. These estimates are conservative, and are based on the current limit that can be considered by the World Heritage Committee each year of 45 nominations, including those that have been re-submitted following a previous Committee decision to refer back or defer (UNESCO 2013b, par. 61b). And, it is notable that 90 new properties were added to Tentative Lists in the one-year period from April 2013 to April 2014 alone. Clearly the 'waiting list' is still lengthening, and there is no sign of slowing the rate of nominations, even at the 40-year milestone. The scale of this activity and the size of the List were never foreseen by the people who crafted and finalised the Convention text, and initiated its working methods (Cameron & Rössler 2013).

As Francioni and Lenzerini (2008) noted, there are obvious pragmatic reasons for the eagerness of States to participate, and relatively few constraints arising from their treaty commitments. Dennis Rodwell (2012: 74) has estimated that the World Heritage List might reach the threshold of 1500 by the year 2030, and 2000 by 2045. In their interviews, Cameron and Rössler (2013) asked their informants about the possible future size of the World Heritage List, and these ranged from (mostly) numbers already surpassed to a lone maximum estimate of 6000. Most commentators consider that there needs to be some kind of future limit to the size of the List in order to safeguard its credibility.

The link between credibility of the Convention and the size of the World Heritage List is frequently asserted. This assumes that the credibility of the system rests primarily on the List.

However, the List is now already much larger than most of the 'pioneers' could have imagined, and it is not easy to foresee a politically acceptable way of limiting its continued growth. This is especially the case given the lack of success after 20 years of efforts initiated by the Global Strategy to slow the rate of nomination by countries that are relatively well-represented on the World Heritage List. It is now worth de-coupling ideas of 'credibility' with the size of the List, and examining how credibility can be retained within a potentially very large List. Focusing on diversity, inclusiveness and conservation outcomes rather than numerical representation seem more promising – and from the perspective of heritage conservation practice, why wouldn't we welcome the continuing interest of States Parties?

Another way that the past is commonly compared favourably with the present concerns the representation of States Parties to the World Heritage Committee. Some observers lament that the membership of the Committee is now more typically comprised of diplomats rather than heritage experts. The comments of former UNESCO Director-General Amadou-Mahtar M'Bow are an example of this point of view:

The great drama at UNESCO now in my view ... is the change to its constitution and countries being represented at the Executive Board by diplomats ... In my time, it was professional people ... I think that professional representation, even if countries want to be represented, that countries should choose professionals and not diplomats. I have nothing against diplomats, but diplomats don't have innate knowledge, they are not familiar with a certain number of problems. It is necessary to choose people who are knowledgeable and obviously know how to safeguard places. (M'Bow, as quoted by Cameron & Rössler 2011: 48)

However, while diplomats do typically lead their national delegations, particularly in the periods when they are elected to the World Heritage Committee, these diplomats are also typically flanked by natural and/or cultural heritage 'experts' at their tables. The active presence of diplomats seems inevitable given the national importance placed on World Heritage outcomes, the need for regional coordination, and the opportunities that the World Heritage system provides for enhancing national prestige and advancing sensitive geo-political relationships via these activities. The different forms of 'expertise' and knowledge drawn into the decision-making processes could therefore be fruitful directions for further research into the dynamics of the World Heritage system.

At the moment, much of the discussion concerns whether the Committee should more consistently follow its own rules (see IUCN 2012). In particular, as already noted, the frequent departure from the provisions of the Operational Guidelines leaves the Advisory Bodies in a very uncertain place since they are requested – and in fact, contractually obliged – to rigorously apply them. However, the possibility of shifting from judging to collaborating, and from a focus on the exclusivity of the List to the sustainability of conservation, are not at all resisted by the Advisory Bodies (ICOMOS 2012b). There must be better ways to work, however the scale and pace of the work each year is very demanding and never stops long enough to re-cast the roles. The time to conduct the needed work is very compressed. The work of the Advisory Bodies is coordinated by small units in each organisation, supported by substantial voluntary inputs. Advisory Bodies and States Parties complain about the constraints created by the current deadlines. The time and consensus-finding spaces needed to imagine something different are difficult to find, and despite the many working groups and expert meetings that have been convened, keeping everyone busier than ever, there is a lack of opportunity to pause and re-design. This puts a practical brake on the pace of innovation by the Advisory Bodies, although incremental improvements have occurred, especially in relation to the transparency of the processes (see for example the series of Resource Manuals that have been developed to assist with the preparation of nominations and management of World Heritage properties (UNESCO 2011a, 2012, 2013a)).

Because of the growing expressions of concern about the 'health' of the World Heritage system and perceptions of a heightened level of 'politicisation', the Director-General of UNESCO initiated a meeting titled 'Thinking Ahead' in October 2012 (UNESCO 2013a). The session

allowed for some valuable and constructive exchanges, but was also characterised by many suggestions, proposals, requests and desires for the World Heritage Centre and the Advisory Bodies to do so much more – in a context with so much less capacity given the extreme financial crisis now faced by UNESCO.

Having worked with the ICOMOS World Heritage program throughout this period, I too am concerned to better understand how the role of ICOMOS as an Advisory Body can be more useful within a system that is changing each year in ways we don't usually foresee. However, I also agree with George Abungu of Kenya who asked in Kyoto whether politicisation is really the main problem, recognising that the Convention has always been a political space. Although some kind of balance point has obviously moved, I also wonder if the 'politicisation' of decisions is the right thing to focus on. As noted already, the role of professional knowledge (or 'experts') is now in the spotlight and is transforming. Despite the current tendency to take decisions that depart from the recommendations of the Advisory Bodies, there is a continuing perception that their 'scientific' or expert technical work is an essential element in sustaining the credibility of the system and the World Heritage List. However, credibility is based on the operations of the system as a whole, and on its outcomes. There are many types of expert knowledge, and experts contributing to all parts of the system – the World Heritage Committee delegations, the World Heritage Centre, the agencies of States Parties, and in the communities and management structures for each property. The focus on the working methods and conceptual orientations of the Advisory Bodies is therefore only part of the picture, and somewhat obscures the contributions of other kinds of experts, as well as the centrality and agency of nation states in this system (see Logan 2013; Askew 2010).

The work of experts is also being shaped by changing notions of 'heritage', the recognition that values can change over time, and respect for diverse forms and sources of knowledge.

If values are not intrinsic to cultural heritage but rather are produced through a process undertaken and influenced by diverse individuals, then the heritage professional's point of view must make room for the interests and beliefs of other, equally invested stakeholders. Within this context, the expert viewpoint loses its specificity and supremacy, ultimately becoming of equal value to the opinions of laymen ... (Labadi 2013: 13)

These are welcome signs that point to shifts in the exclusivity of the voice of the expert (or expert organisation) in the evaluation of significance. While this could be seen as weakening the role of expertise, it is also an indicator of a potentially productive change to more collaborative and inclusive roles, ones that the Advisory Bodies are eager to take. However, the continuing geo-cultural and thematic 'imbalances' in the World Heritage List, including the relatively low number of natural and 'mixed' properties are a challenging source of concern within the system and drive at least some of the 'rush' to inscribe (Labadi 2013; Rico 2008; Willems & Comer 2011). The most commonly expressed views focus negatively on the obvious predominance of properties from Europe compared to other regions. While this is indisputable, such coarse numerical presentations of the World Heritage List are simplistic, failing to illuminate gaps in the World Heritage List (since even in Europe there are differences between countries, property types and themes). This kind of numerical representation of 'balance' also fails to distinguish between a single inscribed building, a historical city centre with thousands of inhabitants, a vast and remote national park, or a cultural route traversing several national borders, thousands of kilometres and hundreds of individual sites. It is easy to see how meaningless such counting is, and yet it is the most common touchstone signifying the problem of 'imbalance'.

Counting also shows a clear 'imbalance' between natural and cultural heritage properties in the World Heritage List. There are many possible reasons underpinning this imbalance, including the preferences and strategic behaviour of States Parties, and perceived differences in the approaches to the evaluation of Outstanding Universal Value by IUCN and ICOMOS (Frey & Steiner 2011). The decision taken in 1992 to consider cultural landscapes – seen at the time as the solution for bridging nature and culture in the Convention – as a form of 'cultural' property has exacerbated the numerical divide between nature and culture in the List (Buckley & Badman 2014). An even numerical distribution between the UNESCO regions, or between

natural and cultural properties does not seem possible from this point in the evolution of the World Heritage List. It is important to clarify what 'imbalance' really means, and what the goals for rectifying it might involve.

The role of professional knowledge and advice does not end at the point of inscribing properties on the World Heritage List, although post-inscription processes are generally the subject of far less commentary and critique (the recent work of Meskell (2011, 2014) is an exception). Conservation efforts are at times overwhelmed due to complex pressures such as armed conflict, climate change, rapid urbanisation, resource exploitation, poorly organised mass tourism, natural disasters and poverty alleviation needs. Recent Committee discussions have stumbled over each of these. Some of the many examples include the destruction of mausoleums in Timbuktu in Mali; the reduction of the Selous Game Reserve in Tanzania for uranium mining; poaching and violence in the Okapi Wildlife Reserve in the Democratic Republic of Congo; impacts of armed conflict in Syria and Iraq; revitalisation and transportation projects in urban settlements in every region from Panama City to Liverpool; and countless discussions about whether World Heritage can coexist sustainably with new projects for dams, roads, skyscrapers, housing, commercial districts, shopping centres, bridges and mines. There is a great but poorly tapped potential for the Advisory Bodies to work collaboratively with States Parties and local communities to consider the impacts and options, and to develop effective management systems. The central premise of working 'upstream' should be equally applicable to the conservation and management of World Heritage properties.

However, many of the pressures on conservation relate to much larger structural problems, such as climate change, poverty, governance and inter-cultural tensions that are not able to be addressed using heritage protection and management tools alone. For these reasons, UNESCO has advocated for culture to be more centrally incorporated within the post-2015 international development agenda (Bandarin 2013; UNESCO 2013d). Sustainable development is an appealing and important framework in this regard, particularly for developing countries. However, finding mechanisms that actually work is a continuing challenge. The solutions will require the World Heritage system to look beyond the boundaries of inscribed properties to consider the resilience of the wider physical and social contexts, including the rights and well-being of local people.

The '5th C' (community) was adopted by the World Heritage Committee in 2007 through the leadership of New Zealand, and the Chairperson of the 31st session, Sir Tumu te Heuheu. It joined the other '4 C's' in the Committee's strategic objectives – conservation, credibility, capacity and communication – to place the interests and needs of communities at the forefront of the Committee's work. However, despite this high level of commitment, the roles and rights of communities have yet to be effectively incorporated into the processes and outcomes of the World Heritage system. Ultimately, community involvement and empowerment will not rely only on 'consultation' and will span the full breadth of the system from values identification, management systems and sustainable development, but this is currently a work in progress (Deacon & Smeets 2013; Harrington 2009; McIntyre-Tamwoy 2004; Sullivan 2004). Capacity building is closely related to this central challenge – for local communities, knowledge-holders and rights-holders as well as for 'experts' in a range of professional disciplines working for national agencies (UNESCO 2011b). Article 5 of the Convention urges State Parties to develop national institutions for conservation, protection and presentation of all cultural and natural heritage, and to 'adopt a general policy which aims to give the cultural and natural heritage a function in the life of the community' (UNESCO 1972, Article 5). Although in place for 40 years, this part of the Convention has been eclipsed by the focus on the World Heritage List, but could provide a useful direction for the future.

## **Shaping the future**

As noted earlier, there is a mood of pessimism in the commentaries among many observers and participants about the future of World Heritage. This was frankly acknowledged by the Director-General of UNESCO at the opening session to the 36th session in St Petersburg. Irina

Bokova spoke about her deep concern, and the opportunity to make a choice about the future of the Convention's credibility and effectiveness:

On its 40th birthday, the World Heritage Convention faces these threats, and also a more fundamental challenge -- that of its credibility and its future. In recent years, some developments within the inscription process have weakened the principles of scientific excellence and impartiality that are at the heart of the Convention.

It is my responsibility to ring the bell.

The credibility of the inscription process must be absolute at all stages of the proceedings -- from the work of the advisory bodies to the final decision by the States Parties, who hold the primary responsibility in this regard. Today, criticism is growing, and I am deeply concerned.

I believe we stand at the crossroads, with a clear choice before us. We can continue to gather, year after year, as accountants of the World Heritage label, adding more sites to the list, adhering less and less strictly to its criteria. Or we can choose another path. We can decide to act and think as visionaries, to rejuvenate the World Heritage Convention and confront the challenges of the 21st century. The World Heritage is not a beauty contest. It is not a race for the greatest number of sites. (Bokova 2012)

At this moment in June 2012, Irina Bokova clearly shared the mood of pessimism about the future, and it is interesting to note her emphasis on the importance of professionalism, and for a more balanced view of the listing functions.

Now that the program of celebration and reflection for the 40th anniversary has concluded, as well as a 4-year process of considering the 'Future of the Convention', the future should be well anticipated. However, despite a considerable amount of formal and informal debate about the future for the World Heritage system, past experience shows how difficult it is to accurately imagine how things might further change. My own experience is completely immersed in the present -- perhaps not the best vantage point for looking ahead. Perhaps it is true that the future is what happens when you are making other plans.

However, as we move steadily toward the 50th anniversary of the Convention, there are some specific areas of current work by ICOMOS and others that could address some of the sources of pessimism. This paper concludes by briefly touching on five areas that seem most promising to me. Each of them poses possibilities for new work or reflection by heritage practitioners.

- better articulation of the relationship between sustainability and heritage
- continued evolution of heritage concepts, transcending their eurocentric origins
- enabling and incorporating rights-based approaches
- overcoming the nature culture divide
- sustaining the long-term commitments to conservation by strengthening the connections between the international and local spheres of activity.

As mentioned already, sustainable development and the post-2015 international development context are important inputs to the future of heritage conservation globally, and for the World Heritage system. The 'Toyama proposal on Heritage and Sustainable Development' was presented to the closing event at Kyoto and points to some important but largely uncharted new work (Japanese Agency for Cultural Affairs and Toyama Prefecture 2012). Taking account of the Rio+20 outcomes and the post-2015 international development agenda, it emphasised the importance of establishing culture as a key issue in crafting the possibilities and overcoming the barriers to achieving the Millennium Development Goals. This context seems very significant, but most of us working in heritage conservation internationally are not well informed about these processes, nor familiar with the conceptual framing of development, or linked into this larger dialogue. It seems essential to join in, to learn more, to take up this challenge and maximise the possible outcomes.

The future will also be informed by continuing changes in heritage concepts and definitions – both within and outside the World Heritage system. One current example was launched in Kyoto – the ‘Himeji Recommendations’ – starting an important evaluation of the messages and intentions of the Nara Document on Authenticity, noting that its 20th anniversary will occur in 2014 (Japan Agency for Cultural Affairs and Himeji City 2012). This is an important vehicle for advancing the development of better tools for community participation, rights-based approaches, and the recognition of cultural diversity within and beyond the implementation of the World Heritage Convention. In 2013, the journal *Heritage and Society* devoted a full issue to this process (see Kono 2013; Araoz 2013; Deacon & Smeets 2013).

As noted earlier, issues of community engagement and control, and recognition of rights issues are a related and current area of work that should ensure a ‘better’ future for the World Heritage system. While the dialogue and the visibility of these issues have increased, the rights and interests of Indigenous peoples and other cultural groups have yet to be fully and effectively incorporated in the World Heritage system. Delegates involved in the International Expert Workshop on World Heritage and Indigenous Peoples, held in Copenhagen in September 2012, brought to Kyoto their own document – the ‘Call for Action’ – aimed at addressing the need to make the implementation of the World Heritage Convention consistent with the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, including the need for free, prior and informed consent in World Heritage processes (Disko & Tugendhat 2013; see also Hales *et al* 2012; Sullivan 2004; UNESCO 2013b). Although these proposals seek to bring the working methods of the Convention into accord with these global principles, and there had been earlier calls for a mechanism (termed WHIPCOE or the ‘World Heritage Indigenous People’s Committee of Experts’) to ensure the visibility of Indigenous people’s interests in World Heritage processes, these have not yet been fully implemented (Meskell 2013b; Cameron & Rössler 2012; Te Heuheu *et al* 2012). ICOMOS is working in this space along with the other two Advisory Bodies – IUCN and ICCROM – in its program titled ‘Our Common Dignity’ led by ICOMOS Norway (Sinding-Larsen 2012; Larsen 2012), and there are obvious possibilities for practitioners and Indigenous communities in all regions to inform and shape this work.

Forty years ago the Convention brought the heritage of culture and nature into a single instrument for international cooperation. At the time, this was as much a matter of pragmatic compromise as inspiration, although Cameron and Rössler (2011: 43) refer to it as a *stroke of genius*. At 40, it is time to find new ways of integrating nature and culture, recognising that culture and nature are not separate, and treating them as though they are can result in adverse outcomes. This is a current area of active research and collaboration by IUCN and ICOMOS, particularly through the project titled ‘Connecting Practice’ involving round table discussions and field work during 2014–2015. This project is exploring the possibility of using integrating concepts – such as ‘biocultural diversity’ – and methods to respond to landscapes in less ‘divided’ ways, focusing less on the ‘divide’ and more on the ‘entanglement’ of values and experiences, and better reflecting the perspectives of associated communities and Indigenous peoples in non-western contexts (Buckley & Badman 2014; Hill *et al* 2011; Maffi & Woodley 2010).

The World Heritage system assumes a good connect between the heritage management approaches and capacities in all three spheres of activity – local, national and international. When these are not connected, many problems arise. States Parties can face challenges in developing successful nominations, especially given the need for effective management systems to be in place. More importantly, conservation commitment of inscription in the World Heritage List can become difficult to sustain over the long-term. Both global and local interests in World Heritage properties need to be effectively incorporated into their management and conservation, and we find that in the decades that follow the sweet moment of inscription, this coordination and common sense of purpose can wane. The ideal of World Heritage is that the international recognition of some special properties is based on and enhances the local and/or national recognition and conservation of many others, and that the capacity for heritage conservation generally should be established and supported throughout the systems in place. As Director-General Bokova’s words above assert, World Heritage is *not a beauty contest*, and Article 5

of the Convention reminds us that World Heritage is not separate from 'local' heritage, even though its mechanisms for safeguarding are oriented towards those few heritage places that are inscribed in the World Heritage List. The conservation, valorisation, and enjoyment of World Heritage are based on the strength, viability and openness of the institutions of every society.

To close, it seems to me especially important to re-focus the present workings of World Heritage on the intertwined mission of facilitating an inter-cultural dialogue for the long-term conservation of places of heritage significance, recognising that their exceptionality will rely to varying extents on both cultural and natural processes. All the methods of working need to be examined accordingly, and the past might increasingly look different than the present, while still nurturing these still-relevant objectives. In her comment on the year, the Director-General of UNESCO, Irina Bokova said – 'together for 40 years we have protected the world's most outstanding places because this is our shared responsibility, because heritage is a force that unifies humanity, because it is a force for peace'. This is the familiar and inspiring rhetoric of UNESCO and its Conventions – and sets a very high bar for our self-evaluation.

## Acknowledgements

This paper is closely based on my keynote address to the Australia ICOMOS National Symposium on World Heritage held in Sydney in November 2012, plus a number of informal presentations that I made at Australia ICOMOS events during 2012 and a presentation to the National Symposium hosted by ACIUCN, which was published as 'Keeping the Outstanding Exceptional: the future of World Heritage in Australia' (Figgis et al 2012).

The paper is informed by my experiences of working side-by-side with many colleagues throughout the world, to whom I am indebted, and was improved through review by Professor Tim Winter and two anonymous reviewers.

I am grateful for the financial support to Australia ICOMOS from the Australian Government's Department of the Environment that supports my travel as ICOMOS Vice-President, and to my colleagues at Deakin University's School of Humanities and Social Sciences and the Cultural Heritage Centre for Asia and the Pacific for supporting my participation in the work of ICOMOS.

## References

- Agency for Cultural Affairs (Japan) and Himeji City 2012, 'The Himeji Recommendations', Recommendations from expert meeting on 'Heritage and Societies – Toward the 20th anniversary of the Nara Document on Authenticity and beyond', Himeji, [retrieved: November 2012] <<http://whc.unesco.org/en/events/929/>>
- Agency for Cultural Affairs (Japan) and Toyama Prefecture 2012, Toyama Proposal on Heritage and Sustainable Development. Prepared by expert meeting 'Conservation and Sustainability – From principle to practice', Toyama, Japan, [retrieved: November 2012] <<http://whc.unesco.org/en/events/930/>>
- Araoz, G. 2013, 'Conservation Philosophy and its Development: Changing understandings of authenticity and significance', *Heritage and Society*, 6(2): 144-154.
- Askew, M. 2010, 'The Magic List of Global Status: UNESCO, World Heritage and the agendas of states', in Long, C. & Labadi, S. (eds), *Heritage and globalization*, Routledge, London, pp. 19-44.
- Bandarin, F. 2013, 'The World Heritage Convention in the post-2015 International Development Agenda', in *Celebrating 40 years of the World Heritage Convention Proceedings*, Closing Event of the Celebration of the 40th Anniversary. November 2012, UNESCO, Kyoto, pp. 110-113.

- Bokova, I. 2011, *Statement by the Director-General of UNESCO on the Withholding of Funds by the United States*, UNESCO Press, Paris, 2 November, 2011.
- Bokova, I. 2012, Address by Ms Irina Bokova, UNESCO Director-General, on the occasion of the opening of the 36th session of the World Heritage Committee, 'Let us Rejuvenate the World Heritage Convention', 24 June 2012, St Petersburg, Russian Federation. DG/2012/096. UNESCO, Paris.
- Brumann, C. 2012, *Multilateral Ethnography: Entering the World Heritage arena*, Working Paper No. 136, Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology, Halle, Germany.
- Buckley, K. & Badman, T. 2014, 'Nature & Culture and World Heritage: Why it matters', in Cameron, C. & Hermann, J. (eds), *Proceedings: Exploring the Cultural Value of Nature: A World Heritage Context*, University of Montreal Roundtable, 12-14 March 2014, pp. 105-121.
- Burke, S. 2012, 'Is Forty the New 30 or the New 50? From the city of Brasilia to the architectural and urban work of Le Corbusier'. Unpublished presentation to the Australia ICOMOS National Symposium on the 40th anniversary of the World Heritage Convention, Sydney, November 2012.
- Cameron, C. 1992, 'The Strengths and Weaknesses of the World Heritage Convention', *Nature and Resources*, 28(3):18-21.
- Cameron, C. 2013, Keynote Speech: 'Forty Years from the Birth of the Convention', in *Celebrating 40 years of the World Heritage Convention Proceedings*, Closing Event of the Celebration of the 40th Anniversary, November 2012, Kyoto, UNESCO, Paris, pp. 26-33.
- Cameron, C. & Rössler, M. 2011, 'Voices of the Pioneers: UNESCO's World Heritage Convention 1972-2000', *Journal of Cultural Heritage Management and Sustainable Development*, 1(1):42-54.
- Cameron, C. & Rössler, M. 2012, 'World Heritage and Indigenous Peoples: The evolution of an important relationship', *World Heritage Review* No. 62, February 2012, pp. 44-48.
- Cameron, C. & Rössler, M. 2013, *Many Voices, One Vision: The early years of the World Heritage Convention*, Ashgate, Farnham.
- Cleere, H. 2011, 'The 1972 UNESCO World Heritage Convention: A success or a failure?', *Heritage & Society*, 4(2):173-186.
- Dacon, H. & Smeets, R. 2013, 'Authenticity, Value and Community Involvement in Heritage Management Under the World Heritage and Intangible Heritage Conventions', *Heritage and Society*, 6(2):129-143.
- Disko, S. & Tugendhat, H. (eds) 2013, International Expert Workshop on the World Heritage Convention and Indigenous Peoples, 20 -21 September 2012 – Copenhagen, Denmark, IWGIA, Copenhagen.
- Figgis, P., Leverington, A., Mackay, R., Maclean, A. & Valentine, P. (eds) 2012, *Keeping the Outstanding Exceptional: The future of World Heritage in Australia*, Australian Committee for IUCN, Sydney.
- Francioni, F. & Lenzerini, F. 2008, *The 1972 World Heritage Convention: A commentary*, Oxford University Press, Oxford.
- Frey, B.S. & Steiner, L. 2011, 'World Heritage List: Does it make sense?', *International Journal of Cultural Policy*, 17(5):555-573.
- Hales, R.J., Rynne, J., Howlett, C., Devine, J. & Hauser, V. 2012, 'Indigenous Free Prior Informed Consent: A case for self determination in World Heritage nomination processes', *International Journal of Heritage Studies*, pp. 1-18. [retrieved: 8 August 2014] <<http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/13527258.2011.654236#.U-Riy7Zgs7A>>
- Harrington, J. 2009, 'Managing Intangible Cultural Heritage: Competing global and local values', *Historic Environment*, 22(3):19-23.

- Harrison, R. 2012, *Heritage: Critical Approaches*, Routledge, London.
- Hill, R., Cullen-Unsworth, L.C., Talbot, L.D. & McIntyre-Tamwoy, S. 2011, 'Empowering Indigenous Peoples' Biocultural Diversity through World Heritage Cultural Landscapes: A case study from the Australian humid tropical forests', *International Journal of Heritage Studies*, 17(6):571-591.
- ICOMOS 2012a, International Day for Monuments and Sites – World Heritage, Paris, [retrieved 8 August 2014] <<http://www.icomos.org/en/what-we-do/focus/18-april-international-day-for-monuments-and-sites>>
- ICOMOS 2012b, 'The World Heritage Convention: Thinking Ahead. Ideas, Proposals and Conservation from ICOMOS for Exploration', Working paper prepared in response to the request by the Director-General of UNESCO for the meeting on 'The World Heritage Convention: Thinking Ahead', October, 2012.
- Isar, Y. R. 2011, 'UNESCO and Heritage: Global doctrine, global practice', in Anheier, H. & Isar, Y.R. (eds), *Heritage, Memory & Identity*, SAGE Publications, London, pp. 39-52.
- IUCN 2012, 'A Future for World Heritage: Challenges and responses to assure the credibility of the World Heritage Convention', Working paper prepared in response to the request by the Director-General of UNESCO for the meeting on 'The World Heritage Convention: Thinking Ahead', October, 2012.
- Jokilehto, J. 2011, 'World Heritage: Observations on decisions related to cultural heritage', *Journal of Cultural Heritage Management and Sustainable Development*, 1(1):61-74.
- Kono, Toshiyuki 2013, 'From the Guest Editor', *Heritage and Society*, 6(2):127-128.
- Labadi, S. 2013, *UNESCO, Cultural Heritage and Outstanding Universal Value*, AltaMira, Walnut Creek.
- Larsen, P.B. 2012, Discussion Paper, 'Advisory Body Evaluations of World Heritage Nominations in Relation to Community and Rights Concerns', Report to IUCN, ICOMOS and ICCROM, June 2012, [retrieved: 23 August 2014] < [https://cmsdata.iucn.org/downloads/world\\_heritage\\_and\\_communities\\_\\_advisory\\_body\\_follow\\_up\\_larsen\\_2012.pdf](https://cmsdata.iucn.org/downloads/world_heritage_and_communities__advisory_body_follow_up_larsen_2012.pdf)>
- Logan, W. 2013, 'Australia, Indigenous Peoples and World Heritage from Kakadu to Cape York: State Party behavior under the World Heritage Convention', *Journal of Social Archaeology*, 13(2): 153-276.
- Maffi, L. & Woodley, E. (eds) 2010, *Biocultural Diversity Conservation: A global sourcebook*, Earthscan, London.
- McIntyre-Tamwoy, S. 2004, 'My Barrier Reef': Exploring the Bowen community's attachment to the Great Barrier Reef', *Historic Environment*, 17(3):19-28.
- Meskell, L. 2011, 'From Paris to Pontdrift: UNESCO meetings, Mapungubwe and mining', *South African Archaeological Bulletin*, 66(194):149-156.
- Meskell, L. 2012, 'The Rush to Inscribe: Reflections on the 35th session of the World Heritage Committee, UNESCO Paris, 2011', *Journal of Field Archaeology*, 37(2):145-151
- Meskell, L. 2013a, 'UNESCO's World Heritage Convention at 40. Challenging the Economic and Political Order of International Heritage Conservation', *Current Anthropology*, 54(4): 483-494.
- Meskell, L. 2013b, 'UNESCO and the Fate of the World Heritage Indigenous Peoples Council of Experts (WHIPCOE)', *International Journal of Cultural Property*, 20:1-20.
- Meskell, L. 2014, 'States of Conservation: Protection, politics and pacting within UNESCO's World Heritage Committee', *Anthropological Quarterly*, 87(1):217-244.
- Pressouyre, L. 1996, *The World Heritage Convention, Twenty Years Later*, UNESCO Publishing, Paris.

- Rao, K. 2013, 'The World Heritage Convention: Looking ahead', in *Celebrating 40 years of the World Heritage Convention Proceedings*, Closing Event of the Celebration of the 40th Anniversary, November 2012, Kyoto, UNESCO, Paris. pp. 82-85.
- Rico, T. 2008, 'Negative heritage: The place of conflict in World Heritage', *Conservation and Management of Archaeological Sites*, 10(4):344-352.
- Rodwell, D. 2012, 'The UNESCO World Heritage Convention, 1972-2012: Reflections and directions', *The Historic Environment*, 3(1):64-85.
- Schofield, J. 2014, 'Heritage Expertise and the Everyday: Citizens and authority in the twenty-first century', in Schofield, J. (ed) *Who needs experts?: Counter-mapping cultural heritage*, Ashgate, Farnham, pp. 1-11.
- Shadie, P. 2012, 'Strategic Issues for World Heritage: Some IUCN and personal perspectives', in Figgis, P., Leverington, A., Mackay, R., Maclean, A. & Valentine, P. (eds), *Keeping the Outstanding Exceptional: The future of World Heritage in Australia*, Australian Committee for IUCN, Sydney, pp. 54-59.
- Sinding-Larsen, A. 2012, 'Our Common Dignity: Rights-based approaches to World Heritage and cultural heritage management', *ICOMOS News*, 19(1):14-16.
- Smith, L. 2006, *Uses of Heritage*, Routledge, London.
- Sullivan, S. 2004, 'Local Involvement and Traditional Practices in the World Heritage System', *World Heritage Papers 13 - Linking Universal and Local Values: Managing a sustainable future for World Heritage*, UNESCO, Paris.
- Te Heuheu, T, Kawharu, M. & Tuheiava, R.A. 2012, 'World Heritage and Indigeneity', *World Heritage Review*, No. 62, February, 2012. pp. 6-15.
- UNESCO 1972, 'Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage', Adopted by the General Conference at its seventeenth session, Paris, 16 November 1972.
- UNESCO 2011a, *Preparing World Heritage Nominations. World Heritage Resource Manual*, 2nd edition, World Heritage Centre, Paris.
- UNESCO 2011b, 'World Heritage Capacity Building Program', Adopted at the 35th session of the World Heritage Committee, Paris. Document WHC11-35COM-9B.
- UNESCO 2012, *40th Anniversary of the World Heritage Convention*, [retrieved: 23 August 2014] < <http://whc.unesco.org/en/40years/>>
- UNESCO 2013a, Summary and Follow-up of the Director-General's meeting on 'The World Heritage Convention: Thinking Ahead' (UNESCO Headquarters 2-3 October 2012). Paper 37 WHC-13/37.COM/5C, 37th session of the World Heritage Commission, Phnom Penh, Cambodia.
- UNESCO 2013b, *Celebrating 40 years of the World Heritage Convention Proceedings*, Closing Event of the Celebration of the 40th Anniversary. November 2012, Kyoto, Japan. Paris.
- UNESCO 2013c, *Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention*, World Heritage Centre, Paris.
- UNESCO 2013d, 'The Hangzhou Declaration: Placing Culture at the Heart of Sustainable Development Policies' Adopted in Hangzhou, People's Republic of China on 17 May 2013.
- von Droste, B. 2011, 'From the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World to the 1,000 World Heritage Places Today', *Journal of Cultural Heritage Management and Sustainable Development*, 1(1):26-41.
- von Droste, B. 2013, 'Main World Heritage Challenges of the Last 40 Years', in *Celebrating 40 years of the World Heritage Convention Proceedings*. Closing Event of the Celebration of the 40th Anniversary. November 2012, Kyoto, Japan. UNESCO, Paris. pp. 36-37.
- Willems, W.J.H. & Comer, D. 2011, 'Africa, Archaeology and World Heritage', *Conservation and Management of Archaeological Sites*, 13(2/3):160-173.