

# **DRAFT DOCUMENT ON THE ROLE OF NATIONAL COMMITTEES IN WORLD HERITAGE PROCESSES**

**June 2024**

## **Background**

In June 2020 a European Working Group was established on the role of National Committees (NCs) in World Heritage processes. Some key issues were identified within the ICOMOS Europe Group that merited an examination of how NCs could contribute more effectively to the processes of WH, including WH Tentative List and candidate sites for WH nomination, advice on nomination and evaluation processes, WH management, State of Conservation, the function of the List of World Heritage in Danger and communications with the ICOMOS WH Units and others.

After some meetings with the WH Units at the Secretariat in Paris, questions included in the Annual Report for NCs, webinars with the presentations of ICOMOS WH Units, and intense work by the Working Group during 2021, 2022 and 2023, an extensive draft report was prepared. The draft report then the subject of discussion with the ICOMOS Secretariat and Board and now in a more condensed text requires discussion and feedback among the NCs.

The following draft includes the main points on nomination processes and will serve as basis for guidelines that contribute to a better understanding of the role of ICOMOS and its NCs in WH processes.

## **Objectives**

The aim of this draft document is to provide guidance on ICOMOS's role as an advisory body to the World Heritage Committee as outlined in the UNESCO World Heritage Convention, and to identify what additional guidance is required by NCs and their members as to how they can best contribute. The document seeks to identify the mechanisms whereby this objective can be achieved, and to identify the scope and potential of ICOMOS NC engagement, contribution and communications with all stakeholders and institutions at national level that are associated with the selection, nomination, evaluation and management of WH properties.

(Note: Annex 1 provides a list of resources available on WH policy, governance, procedure and processes. Annex 2 presents the ICOMOS document on the Role of ICOMOS members and Committees in the context of the World Heritage Convention. Annex 3, 4 and 5 present the powerpoint slides of presentations by the ICOMOS WH Units which identify the role of ICOMOS NCs and ISCs in i) the WH nomination process, ii) Preliminary Assessment and iii) Reporting on state of conservation).

This draft document identifies: the general WH context, the nomination process (TL and WH List) and the stages involved in the evaluation of nominations to the WH List and the circumstances in which NCs have a role and contribution to make.

The WG plans to prepare another document on the role of NCs in the monitoring and management of WH.

## **ICOMOS World Heritage Structure**

### ***The ICOMOS World Heritage Units (Evaluation and Monitoring)***

ICOMOS, is one of the three advisory bodies to the WH Committee on the implementation of the Convention. ICOMOS is responsible for the evaluation of cultural properties and, in partnership with IUCN, of mixed nominations to the WH List.

The organisation and coordination of this ICOMOS mission, is entrusted to the two offices of the World Heritage Units at the ICOMOS International Secretariat: the Evaluation Unit and the Advisory and Monitoring Unit and both, together with ICOMOS special advisors work with expert ICOMOS members drawn from NCs and ISCs worldwide. These Units are located at the headquarters of the ICOMOS International Secretariat.

### **ICOMOS World Heritage work**

In fulfilling its role ICOMOS provides scientific and professional expertise to the WH Committee on cultural heritage issues. This advice includes: Evaluation, Monitoring, Advisory Services and Reflection which contributes to the intellectual development of the Convention.

#### ***Evaluation***

ICOMOS, as an advisory body to the WH Committee, organises, coordinates and ensures the appropriate scientific and technical input to the evaluation of the cultural and mixed sites that are nominated for inscription on the WH List and prepares, via the WH Centre, the assessments and recommendations on each nomination.

In undertaking WH evaluation, ICOMOS consults with the National Committees concerned, and the relevant ICOMOS International Scientific Committees. It also consults with relevant groups of partner non-governmental organisations or experts. All evaluations are the result of this collective judgement.

The identification of experts is based on the range of global, scientific and technical expertise required for the assessment of the nomination dossiers received each year.

An open call is made to NCs, ISCs and ICOMOS working groups each year for Desk Reviewers for all nomination dossiers received. In this way, all ICOMOS members with the appropriate scientific, academic and professional knowledge and experience are invited, to contribute to the desk review process.

#### ***- The ICOMOS WH Panel***

The ICOMOS World Heritage Panel is a selected panel of experts responsible for the scientific and technical assessment of nomination dossiers for cultural and mixed sites. Every year the Panel composition is varied.

The Panel is composed of 32 members, appointed by the President of ICOMOS, as ex-officio President of the Panel. The Panel brings together: international expert members of ICOMOS drawn from the ICOMOS Executive Board and the ICOMOS network and representatives of the ICOMOS International Scientific Committees as voting members; and one representative of ICCROM as observer; one representative of IUCN as observer; six to eight experienced ICOMOS Advisors and the Evaluation Unit senior staff complete this Panel as non-voting members.

The Panel serves a critical advisory function within ICOMOS in that it screens and summarises the findings of all evaluation documentation prepared for each nomination submitted to ICOMOS. The Panel evaluation process involves the nominations dossiers, the Desk Reviews, additional technical reviews/studies, additional information provided by States Parties, ICOMOS National Committee reports, and the ICOMOS Technical Evaluation Mission reports.

The functions of the WH Panel collectively are:

- To oversee the rigorous evaluation of all nominations for the inscription of cultural and mixed properties on the WH List.
- To identify, where necessary, specific additional information to be requested from the States Parties to assist ICOMOS in finalising its recommendations.

- To determine and make the appropriate recommendations of ICOMOS in relation to each new nomination, in accordance with the requirements set out in the OpG.
- To ensure that ICOMOS recommendations are consistent.

Note: Panel members are not involved in the discussions and deliberation of nominations submitted by their nation State.

- *ICOMOS Advisors to the WH Unit and WH Panel*

ICOMOS calls on ad hoc selected international expert WH Advisors to assist the ICOMOS International Secretariat, the WH Panel and the ICOMOS Board in formulating its recommendations to the WH Committee.

The selection of ad hoc experts is always based on the relevance of their knowledge and experience to the issues under review. Most will be ICOMOS members, but other non-members may also be asked for their advice in particular circumstances.

Note: As with WH Panel members, ICOMOS Advisors are not involved in deliberations about nomination from their nation State.

### **ICOMOS National Committees**

The mission of ICOMOS as an international membership organisation, through the work of its NCs and their members, is to promote the conservation, protection, rehabilitation and enhancement of monuments, groups of buildings, and sites at national and international level in accordance with Article 3 of the ICOMOS Statutes. The global organisation is made up of ICOMOS National Committees worldwide and the mission of ICOMOS is promoted at national level through its NCs.

NCs can undertake specific activities on their own initiatives or at the request of their governments. NCs are generally legally incorporated membership organisations in their respective countries. However, there are significant differences in the membership structure, capacities and activities of NCs. NCs contribute to the development and governance of ICOMOS through their participation in the General Assembly, election of members to the Executive Board and the ICOMOS Advisory Committee, and membership of the ICOMOS International Scientific Committees. NCs are the channel through which individual members, specialists and experts in each country can take part in the international activities of ICOMOS. Individual experts from NCs and ISCs can be invited by the WH Unit to undertake specific work related to WH.

There is an Open Call annually to NCs and their members to undertake desk reviews of nomination dossiers. The WH Unit may also invite specific members with particular expertise/experience to prepare document reviews, technical reports, and undertake missions entrusted to ICOMOS by UNESCO.

### **ICOMOS NCs in World Heritage**

At a national level NCs can play a valuable role in WH processes through the involvement of their expert members. They can assist the national State Party and its agencies responsible for WH on all matters related to the processes and requirements of WH.

This may include: contributing to a national WH strategy, technical advice on the selection of sites for the national WH Tentative List and the selection of sites most suited as candidates for WH nominations. Individual NC members frequently advise on the preparation of nomination dossiers in a professional capacity as experts.

To avoid any potential conflict of interest, NCs have a limited consultative role in the evaluation of nominations of their national territories to the World Heritage List.

However, they are consulted and can contribute in two ways:

i) A pro forma questionnaire is sent to each relevant NC following receipt by ICOMOS of nomination dossiers for evaluation in that year. Members of the NC with relevant expertise have the opportunity to respond to the questions posed and send the completed response back to the WH Unit.

ii) ICOMOS NC representatives are invited to meet WH Technical Field Evaluation Mission experts during their mission. The NC organises this meeting with the national agency responsible.

Following inscription, NCs and its members can contribute to the monitoring and management of World Heritage sites in their territory (this will be the subject of a second report by the WG).

### **National Committees' relationships with other stakeholders at national and international level**

The role of the NCs in the World heritage Process, at a national level, varies in different states in Europe. Most NCs work with a variety of agencies and stakeholders before, during and following the nomination process.

### ***National Committees and State Parties***

NCs often have established working/advisory relationships with their State agencies responsible for WH. NCs are usually formally invited to participate with State agencies as observers in the development of their national WH strategies and Tentative Lists, including calls for nominations to the Tentative List, and evaluation of applications received. Representatives from NCs have the opportunity to comment, explain/advise on WH requirements and processes, and to clarify the role and responsibilities of ICOMOS as an advisory body.

NCs may be asked to explain the difference between the scope of activity and responsibilities of an NC in relation to the mandate of ICOMOS as an international advisory body to the WH Committee. A NC may have to explain that NCs do not have such a mandate, and do not have any role in relation to the WH Committee. While the UNESCO Permanent Delegation of the State Party (often a Focal Point)

in each State is generally responsible for all communications relating to WH, NCs can relay a communication on any WH issues through the ICOMOS International Secretariat to the WH Centre who are responsible for all communications between the Committee and States Parties.

### ***National Committees and owners of properties including local and regional governments***

Individual members of NCs or ISCs may participate in professional technical/advisory capacity in steering groups established by property owners and stakeholders during preparation for nomination (e.g. employee of a local government/NGO). In these situations, they are neither representing nor acting on behalf of ICOMOS.

### ***National Committees and individuals, families and communities living in and around the site***

Sometimes individuals, families and communities who live in and around sites that are put forward as candidate nominations may contact a NC for advice about issues including land ownership, cultural, social and economic rights. They may also complain about the lack of proper or meaningful consultation by the property owners, statutory agencies and/or SPs or ask to explain the WH process.

### ***National Committees and voluntary groups and/or NGOs engaged with heritage and WH***

The prevalence of a strong heritage NGO sector varies between countries and some NGOs are more actively involved in WH matters than others. Not all are aware of the existence of ICOMOS NCs or the full extent of NCs role in WH process. Many work in parallel with the NCs promoting their own objectives, but may contact or lobby NCs about individual nominations. Sometimes, the campaigns may be led by political figures or high-profile activists. NCs have to provide advice in an objective way following the ICOMOS Code of Ethics, and it may write or speak in support of the NGOs campaign if it is considered appropriate.

### ***National Committees and the wider public***

UNESCO, ICOMOS, IUCN, World Monument Fund, Europa Nostra and other relevant organisations are increasingly promoting awareness among the wider public about WH and their involvement in the promotion and protection of heritage. This focus is combined with adverse publicity in the press and media about the delisting of some WH sites in the recent past, and the possibility of others being placed on the List of WH in Danger has increased public interest in WH and the listing processes. Also, in some countries, government and charity grant aid for heritage-related projects requires recipients to demonstrate community participation and involvement.

NCs need to create their own strategies for working with the wider public, taking into account ICOMOS position in World Heritage processes. The NCs are encouraged to consult WH Unit or Secretariat in sensitive issues.

## **THE WORLD HERITAGE DESIGNATION PROCESS**

The role and responsibilities of ICOMOS prior to WH inscription relate to the following stages:

- Upstream Process (on TL's and individual sites) (advice, consultation between ICOMOS and States Parties)
- Submission for Preliminary Assessment (States Parties)
- Preliminary Assessment (ICOMOS)
- Submission of the completed nomination (States Parties)
- Completeness check (WH Centre)
- Evaluation: desk review, technical evaluation mission, technical reports, ICOMOS National Committees reports, WH panel meetings, review and evaluation texts (ICOMOS via the WH Centre)
- Discussion and decision by the WH Committee at its annual meeting (WH Committee, Advisory Body representatives and the General Assembly of States Parties)

### **The WH Tentative List**

The WH Tentative List is the list of those properties that each State Party considers potentially eligible for future nomination to the WH List. The State Party prepares its national Tentative List and presents the list to the World Heritage Center for formal inclusion on the WH website page that presents all national TLs,

It is a process in which ICOMOS NCs and their members can play a vital scientific and technical advisory role. Individual NC members may also be contracted to assist in a direct professional consultative capacity and NCs may be asked to provide a technical opinion on the suitability of applications submitted.

### ***National Committees and national agencies***

The relationship between national agencies responsible for WH and NCs varies from country to country in Europe. Many NCs approach their state agency/ies responsible for WH with information and offers of specialist conservation and technical advice in relation to WH. NCs may also be invited by their State Party to act in an observer or advisory capacity in the Tentative List selection process.

Funding arrangements between state agencies responsible for WH and NCs varies from country to country. Some NCs receive no state funding support and function solely as professional membership organisations. While some NCs receive an annual stipend or subsidy to support their activities related to heritage conservation expertise and WH, others undertake this task on a pro bono basis. NCs and their members may receive direct funding for specific reviews requested by their state agencies in respect of the national Tentative List.

NCs can also be invited to comment and provide input on state WH strategies and management of WH properties. NCs do not provide direct corporate professional services but may offer technical advice and input or identify expert members that can do so. Professional consultancy provided by individual ICOMOS members, is determined by their particular expertise and experience; these members undertake this work on a personal professional basis and do not represent the NC or ICOMOS as a corporate body.

The expert opinion or advice offered by individual ICOMOS members, or a NC during the WH Tentative List process with regard to the selection of candidate sites for nomination to the WH List can never be regarded as the corporate advice of ICOMOS in its capacity as an Advisory Body to WH Committee.

### **Preparing nominations to the World Heritage List**

The nomination dossier for inscription on the World Heritage List is prepared either by the State Party, or on behalf of the State Party by local authorities assisted by a range of partners and/or professional technical advisors.

National Committees do not have a formal role in the preparation of nominations to the World Heritage List or their dossiers.

However, individual ICOMOS NC members and ISC members can assist in the preparation of nomination dossiers in a professional advisory capacity, by helping to ensure that the dossier meets the requirements of the Op.G. and is scientifically and technically robust.

### **The Upstream Process**

During nomination preparation, States Parties can benefit from the Upstream Process. This comprises advice, consultation and analysis provided by the Advisory Bodies (ICOMOS, IUCN). Upstream Advice is formally requested by the State Party who makes the request to the WH Centre. during the preparatory stage of the nomination process. The upstream advice may be related to preparation and revision of States Parties' Tentative Lists, or to an individual property (already on the Tentative List or not). This process can include workshops, international consultation of experts through desk reviews, and site visits . The Upstream Process is aimed at reducing the number of nominations that experience significant problems during the evaluation process.

NCs do not have any mandate in relation to the Upstream Process but may be informed by their State Agencies responsible for World Heritage that such advice has been sought.

### **Preliminary Assessment (from 2023)**

A new two-phase evaluation process was adopted by the WH Committee at its meeting in July 2021. Preliminary Assessment was introduced from 2023 on a voluntary basis following a request to the WH Centre by the relevant State(s) Party(ies). The two-stage evaluation process will become mandatory for all nominations from 2027 thereby extending the formal nomination evaluation timeline by 18 months.

The NCs can provide scientific and technical assistance to the State Party by offering to contribute to the examination of the dossiers of candidate sites prior to the formal request for preliminary evaluation.

The State Party decides when a completed dossier is to be submitted as a nomination to the WH List.

NCs are consulted by the Evaluation Unit about the nomination through a questionnaire sent to NCs during the evaluation of PA requests.

### **Submission to the WH Centre**

The Permanent Delegation of the State Party to UNESCO is responsible for ensuring that the dossier is officially transmitted to the WH Centre.

Compliant application dossiers are sent by the WH Centre to the relevant Advisory Bodies (IUCN or ICOMOS) with relevant scientific and technical expertise.

### **The process of nomination evaluation by ICOMOS**

The process of evaluation includes several stages that end up when each year ICOMOS convenes its WH Panel to assess the nomination dossiers sent to ICOMOS by the WH Centre for evaluation.

#### *- Desk Review*

Each dossier goes through a process and series of desk reviews by expert desk reviewers following an open call to all NCs and ISCs for suitably qualified and experienced reviewers.

National Committees and ISCs often assist this process by actively encouraging their expert members to participate by volunteering for this work.

ICOMOS selects the experts it considers the most suitable to carry out the desk reviews, up to ten experts (sometimes even more), may be consulted for this review

In recent years, to benefit from the vast expertise of ICOMOS members, specific formats for desk reviews have been developed with ISCs on issues such as cultural tourism, risk preparedness, human rights or the rights of Indigenous Peoples, to obtain the points of view of ISC members on these specific issues.

Some dossiers require additional review, involving other institutions such as universities, research institutes, as well as partner non-governmental organisations and ad hoc experts that can be consulted during the evaluation process. The identity of desk reviewers remains anonymous.

The ICOMOS National Committees (NC) of each of the countries from which the nominations have been received are sent a specific questionnaire to answer about the nomination concerned. In this way the evaluation process ensures timely consultation with each NC.

#### *- Technical Evaluation Mission*

For each property, a technical evaluation mission is undertaken by an expert designated by the chairs of the WH Panel and the WH Unit.

The mission of this expert is to assess the authenticity and integrity of the property, its boundaries and factors affecting its protection, conservation and management in the field.

The task involves the expert's in-depth review of the nomination dossier, a visit and detailed inspection of the site, and meetings with State Party representatives, the site managers, representatives of local organisations and others invited by the State Party including representatives of the ICOMOS NC.

National Committees are notified by the WH Unit about the dates of the technical evaluation mission, once these are confirmed, and they are encouraged to meet the mission expert during the mission to discuss the nomination.

A written report on the mission is prepared by the mission expert and sent to the WH Unit for examination by the WH Panel, together with the completed desk review/s and any other expert documentation sought by the Panel.

It seems important to allow the expert appointed by ICOMOS, during the mission, exclusive meeting time with the designated members representing the National Committee concerned. To allow a broad, open and confidential exchange, it is necessary that this meeting takes place without the presence of other actors or bearers of the dossier. In order to guarantee the confidentiality and protection of participants, the content of this meeting must remain within the sole knowledge of the National Committee and the expert; the latter can then mention it in his report intended exclusively for ICOMOS-WHU.

#### *-Concluding the review and evaluation by ICOMOS*

Following the World Heritage Panel meeting, an Interim Report is sent to States Parties by end of January and Additional Information Request may be made by ICOMOS through this report; the State Party should respond by 28 February at the latest.

At the end of the broad consultation and evaluation procedure, the ICOMOS-WH Unit entrusts the ICOMOS WH Panel to finalise the scientific and technical examination of all dossiers and present its report and conclusions on each.

National Committees do not have a role in this phase of the process.

Panel members do not participate in the evaluation of a nomination from their own countries.

The reports on each nomination forms part of the annual collated evaluation report on all the nominations referred to ICOMOS which is sent to the WH Centre together with the formal recommendations of ICOMOS for each nomination. In addition, ICOMOS provides draft decision texts in these reports for the information of the WH Committee. These reports form part of the Agenda documents for the annual WH Committee Meeting.

The collated evaluation report remains confidential until it is received by the WH Centre (the originator of the evaluation request to ICOMOS; the WH Centre is therefore holder of the rights to the evaluation with responsibility for its distribution).

The final evaluation report is transmitted by the WH Centre to the State Party and made public as part of the collated reports of the Advisory Bodies six weeks before the annual session of the WH Committee.

The ICOMOS WH Unit is not authorised to distribute its evaluation reports to National Committees until these reports are made available to the World Heritage Committee.

#### *- The WH Committee Meeting*

UNESCO convenes the intergovernmental WH Committee once a year (usually in June/July).

ICOMOS National Committees have no mandate at these meetings.

World Heritage Committee meetings have detailed agendas and reports for each agenda item. The examination of nominations for inscription on the World Heritage List (and the associated evaluation reports) is only one of the items on the agenda; however, more and more time is devoted to each year. The Committee also reviews and takes decisions on a large number of other items, some of which are reviewed annually. These items relate to reports on the monitoring of the state of conservation of World Heritage properties, reports on the List of World Heritage in Danger, periodic reporting of different regions of the world and other reports on policy, groups work, funding request and other agenda items.

- *Emergency nominations*

There is a special procedure for nominations to be processed on an emergency basis.

The normal timetable and definition of completeness nomination dossiers does not apply in the case of properties which are in evident danger. These nominations constitute emergency situations, and an immediate decision can be made by the Committee to ensure that the endangered property is safeguarded, and which, according to the report of the relevant Advisory Bodies, may unquestionably justify Outstanding Universal Value.