

19. Prof. Dr. Bogusław Szmygin, ICOMOS Poland

## WORLD HERITAGE LIST – CHALLENGES AND THREATS

The World Heritage List (WHL) is the most successful initiative regarding heritage protection undertaken on the worldwide scale. Such an opinion can be justified by many arguments. The WHL is truly a worldwide initiative; The WHL has reached a remarkable level of quantity and quality development; a new and very comprehensive evaluation system of nominations for WHL has been created; WHL combines the cultural and natural heritage within common frameworks; the status of World Heritage site is very desirable due to its prestige and promises for tourism development. However, this worldwide success of WHL is not given forever.

The WHL has gained success because its meaning goes beyond heritage protection. It also has political, economic, promotional, and touristic significance. The number of sites inscribed on the WHL builds the image of the State Party; is proof of cultural richness; is a source of prestige; is a basis for promotion; and is a very important factor for tourism development. However, additional dimensions of the WHL also cause additional problems. For example, due to political correctness the statistical analysis of the WHL (“Gaps Report”) is treated as a measure of its representativeness and has influence on the evaluation of new nominations. It also limits the reliability of evaluation of particular types of nominations (especially within “living cultures”) and as a result has influence on their protection.

During the period of implementation of the World Heritage Convention the organisational and formal issues have been solved most efficiently. One can state, that organisational structures and procedures of the WHL are relevant for its needs. This also applies for the nomination process. Substantial issues, which are a result of a great variety of heritage and complexity of conditions of its protection, have not been solved so efficiently. Two main objectives have to be fulfilled now: to ensure sufficient quality and representativeness of new inscriptions and to ensure effective protection of sites already inscribed on WHL.

For improving the evaluation system of new nominations the following issues have to be solved: firstly, introduction of substantial (not only statistical) evaluation of the representativeness of WHL – the “Gaps Report” does not respect cultural differences and especially not the equal achievements of cultures; secondly, respect to the specificity and variety of nominated sites, in the context of the evaluation of authenticity, integrity and possibilities of protection – especially in the case of historical towns, cultural landscapes, and industrial heritage; And thirdly, the issue of the growing complexity and costs of preparing new nominations and dossiers.

To improve the system of protection of inscribed sites the following issues have to be solved: firstly, introduction of an external control system for inscribed sites – the existing system of self-control (used in Periodic Report) is not reliable; secondly, elaboration of indicators for monitoring values of World Heritage sites – especially for places which have to be changed or modernised (sites of “living cultures”); and thirdly, analysis of real consequences of inscription of heritage sites on WHL – damages caused by mass tourism, costly conservation works, modernisations and adaptations.

Summing up, the number of World Heritage issues is still growing as is the scope of their complication. The future of the WHL depends on whether we find the solutions for these challenges.