

**International
Expert
Meeting** on

**Astronomical
Heritage** and
Sacred Places

Gran Canaria, 23rd - 24th May 2018

**Gran Canaria
Recommendation**

The International Expert Meeting on Astronomical Heritage and Sacred Places was organised by the Cabildo of Gran Canaria in close collaboration with the UNESCO World Heritage Centre, in co-operation with the Canary Island Government and with the support of the Spanish Ministry of Education, Culture and Sports



International Expert Meeting on Astronomical Heritage and Sacred Places

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Gran Canaria Recommendation

We, experts from 18 States Parties drawn from all regions of the world (Australia, Canada, France, Germany, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Greece, the Holy See - State of Vatican City, the Republic of Korea, Mali, Mexico, Peru, the Russian Federation, the Kingdom of Spain, Tunisia, the United Kingdom, USA), and the representatives of the UNESCO World Heritage Centre, the Advisory Bodies (ICOMOS, IUCN) to the World Heritage Committee, the ICOMOS International Scientific Committee on Places of Religion and Ritual (PRERICO), the International Astronomical Union (IAU) Commission C4 on World Heritage and Astronomy and its Working Groups, The International Society for Archaeoastronomy and Astronomy in Culture (ISAAC), The European Association of Archaeologists (EAA), the European Society for Astronomy in Culture (SEAC), The Starlight Initiative, and National Focal Points for the UNESCO-IAU Astronomy and World Heritage Initiative (AWHI), assembled in Gran Canaria on the occasion of the International Expert Meeting on Astronomical Heritage and Sacred Places (23rd to 24th May, 2018);

Thanking the authorities of the Kingdom of Spain, and in particular of the Cabildo of Gran Canaria, for their warm hospitality in hosting and organising the meeting in close collaboration with the World Heritage Centre, with important and generous support from the Canary Island Government and the Spanish Ministry of Education, Culture and Sport;

Considering that the sky is the common heritage of all humanity, revered by peoples and communities throughout the ages, and has served – as it still does – as an endless source of inspiration;

Aware that humanity has always observed the sky as a source of inspiration and their understanding of the sacred, and to understand the physical laws that govern the cosmos, and that this interest in astronomy and the observation of the sky has had profound implications for our culture including science and beliefs, and our general conception of the universe;

Recalling the principles set forth in the World Heritage Convention, its Operational Guidelines and other relevant documents, including the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples¹, the Kyiv Statement on the protection of religious properties within the framework of the World Heritage Convention², adopted by the World Heritage Committee as well as during different sessions and meetings, including those organized within the frameworks of the UNESCO Thematic Initiatives on Heritage of Religious Interest³ and Astronomy and World Heritage⁴;

Believing that there is further a need to integrate these two latter frameworks to recognise the interaction between astronomy and the sacred, and also to develop further synergies with other World Heritage programmes and UNESCO initiatives and instruments⁵ as endorsed by the World Heritage Committee in 2016 (40 COM 5D, Istanbul, 2016)⁶;

Recalling particularly Article I of the World Heritage Convention which includes science in defining cultural heritage;

Considering that the interaction between the two UNESCO Thematic Initiatives on Heritage of Religious Interest and on Astronomy and World Heritage offers a new space for co-operation that permits the establishment of synergies and confluences between sacred places with astronomical connotations by contributing to the implementation of five Strategic Objectives of the World Heritage Convention, namely the five “C”s—credibility, conservation, capacity-building, communication, and communities;

In the light of the recommendations of the 2008 Expert Working Group on Science and Technology according to which science and technology are defining characteristics of human culture⁷, the recommendations of the International World Heritage Expert Meeting on Criterion (vi) and associative values (Warsaw, 2012)⁸, and the report Guidance and capacity building for the recognition of associative values using world heritage criterion (vi) (University of Montreal, 2018)⁹, developed following the World Heritage Committee decision (Decision 36 COM 13.I, Saint Petersburg, 2012)¹⁰ seeking the development of further in-depth guidance on the recognition and management of cultural associations as part of the OUV of properties;

Recognising that the cosmos has captivated the imagination of all societies and cultures which may be reflected in their heritage including architecture, town planning, use of landscape, petroglyphs, mythologies, oral traditions, and other cultural expressions including sacred beliefs and practice;

Recalling that material evidence of both religious and astronomical heritage, spanning all periods of time, can be found all over the world, bearing witness to the complexity and diversity of the ways in which peoples and communities have developed belief systems, traditions and science, and that the perpetual interaction between observation of the sky, astronomical knowledge and living traditions are cornerstones of human culture and the diversity of cultural expressions;

Considering too that some sites demonstrating these relationships are of such significance that they may be of Outstanding Universal Value and capable of being inscribed in the UNESCO World Heritage List, which could contribute to the Global Strategy for a balanced, representative and credible World Heritage List;

Recognising that improvements to guidance on the management and recognition of such places, including, if appropriate, nomination to the World Heritage List are needed;

Considering the need to identify and reinforce the ties that exist between religious/ sacred traditions and knowledge of the sky, that illustrate in many places the close relationship between spirituality, the skyscape, and sacred places, and the clear connections of sacred sites with astronomy and/ or the skyscape existing in many places, and indeed that the skyscape of specific sites may have associative values which need to be protected and managed;

Endorsing the proposal of the IAU to develop a list of IAU-accredited 'Outstanding Astronomical Sites' and of endangered astronomical heritage, which will be launched at the IAU 2018 General Assembly in Vienna in August;

Recognising also that such sites arouse strong local interests and involve local communities, including indigenous peoples, as well as scientists and heritage specialists, and therefore require a management system which is inclusive of all interests; and

Welcoming the proposals for a meeting in Menorca entitled "Islands: territories trapped between the sky and the sea" (2019) and highlighting the importance of the next celebration of the ritual traditional ceremony named Sigui in the Dogon land in Mali for 2027;

We recommend that:

UNESCO

1. *establishes* the intersectoral platform to implement both initiatives on Astronomical Heritage and on Heritage of Religious Interest in synergy with all relevant UNESCO Conventions, initiatives and programmes¹¹ as endorsed by the World Heritage Committee at its 40th session (40 COM 5D, Istanbul, 2016)¹²;

World Heritage Committee

2. *review* the criteria for assessing Outstanding Universal Value (particularly (iv), (v), (vi), (vii), and (viii)) to ensure that they contain appropriate reference to the value of science in accordance with the definition of cultural heritage in Article 1 of the World Heritage Convention, and to the significance of skylscapes;

3. *encourage* the use of the methodology developed by the 2017/ 2018 expert group on criterion (vi) for assessment of the potential use of that criterion (Guidance and capacity building for the recognition of associative values using world heritage criterion (vi) University of Montreal, 2018) in developing World Heritage nominations;
4. *encourage* the creation of a network of experts linking astronomy, and sacred sites, both cultural and natural, to improve connectivity between those working in these areas, including the development of comparative analyses as part of thematic studies;
5. *consider* renaming the Astronomy and World Heritage Thematic Initiative as the Heritage of Astronomy, Science and Technology;

Advisory Bodies and International Astronomical Union

6. *promote* the use of guidance and recommendations produced by the Advisory Bodies to the World Heritage Convention and UNESCO on the protection of heritage of religious interest¹³ and astronomical heritage^{14 15};
7. *develop* capacity building materials to raise awareness of the linkages between sacred sites and astronomy among those preparing and evaluating nominations;
8. *produce* guidance, including case studies and the sharing of experience and good practice from different properties, on using an holistic and inclusive approach to recognition and management of the associative values of both cultural and natural heritage, and the identification of relevant attribute types supporting such values;

The Joint World Heritage Centre Advisory Bodies Steering Group on Heritage of Religious Interest

9. *take* account of the results of this meeting in further development of general guidance on management of religious heritage as requested by the World Heritage Committee in 2011 (Decision 35 COM 5A, UNESCO, 2011)¹⁶

States Parties

10. *Identify and prepare* inventories of all values of properties and sites with astronomical and religious¹⁷/ sacred¹⁸ importance associated with natural and cultural heritage, including cultural landscapes;
11. *Recognising* that there are various forms of UNESCO and other international recognition of heritage¹⁹, *explore* all appropriate forms of recognition for sites of astronomical and sacred interest, recognising that not all sites of interest will have demonstrable Outstanding Universal Value under the World Heritage Convention;
12. *Propose* new nominations to the World Heritage List or the addition of new criteria to existing properties

based on associative values on the basis only of rigorous research and comparative studies to ensure that the potential for Outstanding Universal Value is well established;

13. *Introduce and improve* systems of governance which ensure realistic, equitable, participatory and inclusive approaches to management of properties of astronomical and sacred interest, *ensuring* that all governance and management systems are fully inclusive of all sectors of society, including indigenous peoples, and that communication and connectivity between them should be improved;

14. *Acknowledge the need to overcome differences* between the modern and traditional uses of sacred sites, including by facilities of modern astronomy and *take steps* to involve all stakeholders, including rightsholders, in order to resolve such differences;

15. *Recognising* in the context of environmental protection that the sky and earth are a unity which cannot be separated, *protect* properties of astronomical and sacred interest through use of the precautionary principle and appropriate legal and practical measures, *preserve* astronomical alignments and skylines by appropriate spatial planning measures such as the creation of buffer zones

16. Further *take measures* to apply the Policy for the integration of a sustainable development perspective into the implementation of the World Heritage Convention (2015)²⁰ and to mitigate Climate Change in accordance with the relevant World Heritage Committee Policy²¹, and to achieve prevention or reduction of light pollution, and the promotion of dark skies;

17. *Support* existing relevant uses of sacred and astronomical sites prioritising fragile cultures and promoting sustainable uses such as responsible tourism, and their integration into the life of the community, particularly on islands which are vulnerable to pressures;

18. *Promote* the knowledge of astronomical values and its dissemination through the use of multimedia approaches to describe complex scientific concepts in ways which are simple and accessible, in compliance with the criteria established in the *London Charter for the Computer-based Visualisation of Cultural Heritage* (2008);

19. *Develop* programmes of follow-up activities, as announced in the *Yerevan Recommendation*²², in consultation with the IAU Commission C4 World Heritage and Astronomy and the joint World Heritage Centre/ Advisory Bodies Steering Group on Heritage of Religious Interest, and introduce to such programmes working sessions on linkages between the two initiatives.

- ¹ United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unpfii/documents/DRIPS_en.pdf
- ² Statement on the Protection of Religious Properties within the Framework of the World Heritage Convention <http://whc.unesco.org/en/religious-sacred-heritage/>
- ³ UNESCO Initiative on Heritage of Religious Interest <http://whc.unesco.org/en/religious-sacred-heritage/>
- ⁴ Astronomy and World Heritage Thematic Initiative <http://whc.unesco.org/en/astronomy/>
- ⁵ Report on the World Heritage Thematic Programmes, Document WHC/16/40.COM/5D p. 12 – 14 <http://whc.unesco.org/archive/2016/whc16-40com-5D-en.pdf>
- ⁶ Decision 40 COM 5D Report on the World Heritage Thematic Programmes <http://whc.unesco.org/en/decisions/6777/>
- ⁷ Recommendations of the Science and Technology Expert Working Group in the context of World Heritage Nominations, Document WHC-11/35.COM/9C <https://whc.unesco.org/archive/2011/whc11-35com-9Ce.pdf>
- ⁸ Report of the International World Heritage Expert Meeting on Criterion (vi) and associative values (Warsaw, Poland, 28-30 March 2012) <https://whc.unesco.org/uploads/events/documents/event-827-15.pdf>
- ⁹ Guidance and Capacity Building for the Recognition of Associative Values using World Heritage Criterion (vi) January 2018 <https://whc.unesco.org/document/167760>
- ¹⁰ Decision 36 COM 13.I Revision of the Operational Guidelines <http://whc.unesco.org/en/decisions/4853/>
- ¹¹ Report on the World Heritage Thematic Programmes, Document WHC/16/40.COM/5D p. 12 – 14 <http://whc.unesco.org/archive/2016/whc16-40com-5D-en.pdf>
- ¹² Decision 40 COM 5D Report on the World Heritage Thematic Programmes <http://whc.unesco.org/en/decisions/6777/>
- ¹³ <http://whc.unesco.org/en/religious-sacred-heritage/#history> ; <http://whc.unesco.org/en/religious-sacred-heritage/#communities> ; <http://whc.unesco.org/en/religious-sacred-heritage/#prism>; <https://whc.unesco.org/en/activities/864/> ; <https://whc.unesco.org/en/activities/863/>
- ¹⁴ <http://whc.unesco.org/en/astronomy/> ; <http://whc.unesco.org/en/astronomy/#meetings>; <http://whc.unesco.org/en/astronomy/#references>
- ¹⁵ Thematic Study “Heritage Sites of Astronomy and Archaeoastronomy in the context of the UNESCO World Heritage Convention” <https://whc.unesco.org/en/activities/631/>
- ¹⁶ Decision 35 COM 5A Report of the World Heritage Centre on its activities and the implementation of the World Heritage Committee’s Decisions <http://whc.unesco.org/en/decisions/4373/>
- ¹⁷ The term “Religious property”, as used in the ICOMOS study “Filling the Gaps - an Action Plan for the Future” (<https://whc.unesco.org/document/102409>), defines “any form of property with religious or spiritual associations: churches, monasteries, shrines, sanctuaries, mosques, synagogues, temples, sacred landscapes, sacred groves, and other landscape features, etc.”
- ¹⁸ The term “Sacred site” embraces areas of special spiritual significance to peoples and communities; and the term of “Sacred natural site” corresponds to the areas of land or water having special spiritual significance to peoples and communities,” as proposed by the UNESCO/IUCN Guidelines for the Conservation and Management of Sacred Natural Sites, 2008 <http://data.iucn.org/dbtw-wpd/edocs/PAG-016.pdf>
- ¹⁹ 1972 World Heritage Convention, 2003 UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Heritage, UNESCO Memory of the World programme; UNESCO Man and the Biosphere Programme, UNESCO International Geoscience and Geoparks Programme (IGGP), as well as an IAU proposal for establishing a ‘List of Outstanding Astronomical Sites’
- ²⁰ Policy for the Integration of a Sustainable Development Perspective into the Processes of the World Heritage Convention <https://whc.unesco.org/document/139747>
- ²¹ World Heritage resources for responding to climate change <https://whc.unesco.org/en/climatechange/>
- ²² Regional Thematic Expert Consultation meeting on sustainable management of World Heritage properties of Religious Interest focused on Eastern Europe (2018) <https://whc.unesco.org/document/167785>



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United Nations
Educational, Scientific and
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World
Heritage
Centre

Astronomy and World Heritage Thematic Initiative
UNESCO Initiative on Heritage of Religious Interest



IAU Commission C4

