THE ICOMOS INTERNATIONAL CULTURAL TOURISM CHARTER: 
LINKING CULTURAL HERITAGE CONSERVATION 
TO THE CELEBRATION OF CULTURAL DIVERSITY

Graham Brooks *

Introduction

This Paper responds to the principal theme of the ICOMOS Scientific Symposium, Madrid 2002, Strategies for the world’s cultural heritage preservation in a globalised world: principles, practices, perspectives.

It argues that the ICOMOS International Cultural Tourism Charter provides ICOMOS with an important basis for responding to the challenges of sustaining and expanding preservation or conservation in a globalised world. One of the great challenges facing ICOMOS in the 21st century is to balance the application of standard or universal conservation principles with the recognition, protection and promotion of cultural diversity within the myriad of individual communities that define the international conservation environment.

The Paper establishes a key part of the theme for Section 6 of the Scientific Symposium, Public Awareness. It demonstrates how the ICOMOS International Cultural Tourism Charter can provide a foundation for much of the wider work of ICOMOS, its International and National Committees, at this critical point in the debate over the benefits and threats of globalisation.

Globalisation, Friend or Foe?

Globalisation has both its supporters and detractors. Those who support it claim benefits from open markets, greater international flows of capital and expertise, and greater access to information and technology. They see globalisation as universal, unobjectionable and undeniable. Globalisation became a mantra during the last decade of the 20th century. Discussion in international circles revolved around the decline of “country” and “locality”, and the rise of globalisation in most walks of life.

Its detractors focused on the overwhelming influence and market dominance of international organisations, the destruction of local economic capacity and the loss of individual community and cultural identity. It has been rightly blamed for the imposition of standardised, poorly designed, insensitive and often totally inappropriate financial and governance measures that have seen some societies reduced to poverty or severely constrained in their economic growth.

Standing against the forces unleashed by globalisation is the cultural diversity of individual countries and communities around the world.

Globalisation essentially refers to the closer integration of countries and people around the world, brought about by the enormous reduction in the cost of transportation and communications, the breaking down of barriers to the flow of goods and services, capital, knowledge and information across national borders. The rapid pace of change inherent in globalisation has made cultural adaption difficult for individual communities, leading to social dislocation. At a time of increasing globalisation, the protection, conservation, interpretation and presentation of the heritage and cultural diversity of any particular place or region, is an important challenge for people everywhere.

In many ways cultural heritage conservation already operates in a globalised manner.

The conservation industry within international, national and regional sectors works in a relatively consistent way towards a commonly agreed objective. Modern communications, affordable travel, international conferences and shared information have generated a remarkably consistent approach to the conservation of cultural heritage across the world, over the last quarter century. ICOMOS, UNESCO, the World Heritage Convention and organisations such as the Getty, World Monument Fund and Ford Foundation, provide an international global architecture for conservation that is underwritten by a consistent methodology and philosophy, one that extends across most parts of the world.

The conservation, communication and celebration of the cultural heritage and cultural diversity of individual societies are therefore major responsibilities of the international conservation community. However, management of that heritage, within a framework of internationally recognised and appropriately applied standards, is usually the responsibility of the particular community or custodian group.

The cultural identity of individual communities, and its manifestation as tangible and intangible cultural heritage, is increasingly being seen as a major factor that can enable them to withstand and respond to the power of globalised market forces. Cultural identity enhances the capacity of