PART 1

Introduction to World Heritage Sites
Part One of this book explores the broad context within which UNESCO designated World Heritage Sites (WHS) operate. While the book considers the management issues involved in heritage sites in general, it specifically focuses on the UNESCO designated WHS as being indicative of the need successfully to manage these properties. The variety of the sites on the World Heritage List is indicative of the complex issues involved in the effective management of these natural and cultural resources. The aim of this initial section is to consider the role of tourism within the whole World Heritage process, in that it has a significant role to play but that a careful balance of activities is required to maintain the very nature of the resource that visitors seek.

The key themes and issues addressed in this Part include a précis of how a heritage property or resource becomes designated as a World Heritage Site – from the initial suggestion to the final inscription by the World Heritage Committee. In Chapter 1 Anna Leask outlines the process of inscription, before investigating the motivations for pursuing this accolade and the implications for a States Party and site. She then moves on to consider the current representation on the World Heritage List (WHL) and where the main advisory bodies of ICOMOS and IUCN have identified gaps. These bodies have identified some inequalities in the WHL across the categories of designation – natural, cultural and mixed – and geographically, with a heavy lean towards European cultural properties. There follows some discussion concerning the future of the WHL, though this is dealt with in much more detail in Chapter 11. Throughout the chapter, the author recognizes that there are varying viewpoints with regards to tourism activity at WHS. To some it is the key motivation for pursuing the status, while for others it is a marginal activity. For some it is already an established factor in the dynamics of the site, while for others the lack of infrastructure or the political situation precludes effective and appropriate tourism activity. This aspect of politicization is a recurrent theme, of relevance to the motivations for inscription, the decisions around which sites are nominated and how the World Heritage Convention operates and will be revisited throughout the book. Not least there needs to be recognition of the variety of breadth of stakeholders involved in the nomination, inscription and ongoing management of World Heritage Sites, resulting in a challenging operating environment.

In Chapter 2 C. Michael Hall explores the differences in implementation of the World Heritage Convention between States Parties, investigating what the designation means for a country as well as a site. One key theme here is that of the implications of designation – what they are, how they are measured (if at all) and how they can be optimized appropriately to the WHS. Does a site attract more visitors following WHS inscription and what other implications might there be, for example legislation? He concludes with the thought that
there needs to be a change in the whole focus of WHS management, with less emphasis on the process of gaining inscription, rather to the implementation of the WHConvention following inscription. His view being that the story does not end once a site gains the status, rather that it should be the start for the improved management of the site via systematic evaluation, monitoring and reporting on the impacts of WHS listing.
CHAPTER 1

World Heritage Site designation

Anna Leask
Introduction

This chapter acts as an introduction to the process of identification, nomination and inscription for WHS across the globe. This enables the future chapters to concentrate on the specific issues in relation to their implications and applications within various settings, rather than each re-examining the process. The content will cover the aims above in seeking to explain the at times complex process whereby a site deemed to be of significant worth is inscribed onto the WHL. It will consider the vast range of bodies, organizations and stakeholders who become involved in the process and the role that they play. The key management role is that of UNESCO to identify and aid the conservation of those sites deemed to be of outstanding universal value. While the sheer variety of resources protected by the designation creates its own difficulties in the application of UNESCO practices and sustainable management of the sites, a fact noted by Bandarin (2005), UNESCO recognizes this and uses its ‘coveted WHS programme as a means of spreading best practice in sustainable management’. The chapter will then raise many of the controversial and political issues surrounding the whole concept of World Heritage in attempting to highlight the disparate views on the success and potential longevity of the designation process. It will then conclude with a summary of the process to act by way of introduction to later chapters that will tackle many of these points more directly.

What is a World Heritage Site?

Approved in 1972, the ‘Convention concerning the Protection of the World’s Cultural and Natural Heritage’ was adopted by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and came into force in 1976, when it had been ratified by twenty
countries. It has since been ratified by 180 States Parties across the
globe. The purpose of the Convention is to ‘ensure the identifica-
tion, protection, conservation, presentation and transmission to future
generations of cultural and natural heritage of outstanding universal
value’ (UNESCO, 2005a). The Convention states that the World
Heritage Committee (WHC) should coordinate the process of design-
ating these sites through a system known as inscription, which
includes an evaluation of the resources by experts against a set of
known criteria. The aim is to encourage conservation of the resources
within the designated sites and surrounding buffer zones on a local
level and also to foster a sense of collective global responsibility
via international cooperation, exchange and support. While designa-
tion only incurs additional legislative power in a few States Parties,
South Africa and Australia for example, ‘the prestige of being on the
WHL is deemed such that a high level of protection will exist on the
site’ (Historic Scotland, 2005). Once designated, the States Party
accepts responsibility for the effective management of the site and
commits to adopting the ‘Operational Guidelines for the Implemen-
tation of the World Heritage Convention’ and the systems of reactive
and periodic reporting set in place by UNESCO. If it fails to do this
effectively then the threat of removal from the WHL is present, though
it has not, to date, been exercised.

Sites may be nominated as cultural, natural or mixed criteria, with
designation reliant upon the type of criteria that they are deemed to
present in an exceptional form. The diversity of WHS is vast, includ-
ing the Great Barrier Reef, Australia as the largest, former colonial
cities such as the Historic Town Centre of Macau, engineering feats
such as the Mountain Railways of India, artistic works such as those
of Gaudi, natural phenomena such as the West Norwegian Fjords
and cultural and natural resources combined in situations such as
the Island of St Kilda off the coast of Scotland. Prior to 2005 nomin-
atations were evaluated against a set of six cultural and four natural
criteria, though these have now been combined into one set of ten
including:

to represent a masterpiece of human genius or to contain super-
lieve natural phenomena; or areas of exceptional natural beauty and
aesthetic importance; or to bear a unique or at least exceptional
testimony to a cultural tradition or to a civilisation which is living or
which has disappeared (UNESCO, 2005b).

The criteria are listed in full in Table 1.1. Sites may be nominated as
representing examples of one or more criteria, indeed, many of the
early nominations cover all six of the cultural criteria, for example
Venice. While every attempt has obviously been made to clarify
what is meant by terms such as ‘outstanding universal value’, the
boundaries of ‘uniqueness’ and the criteria themselves, with these being the topic of debate and revision in recent years, evaluation is still essentially a subjective process. ICOMOS (2004) has commented that ‘Unlike natural heritage, cultural heritage is fragmented and diverse and not predisposed to clear classification systems’.

**How are WHS designated?**

The initial step in the inscription process is for a site to be identified within a States Party as suitable for nomination. It is this stage that is often crucial and subject to a significant level of political negotiation, where some commentators might comment on the questionable priority given to some sites over others. Each States Party should then develop a Tentative List (TL) – an ‘inventory of the cultural and natural
properties of outstanding universal value within its territory, which it considers suitable for inclusion and it intends to nominate for inscription on the WHL in the following years’ (UNESCO, 2005c) – though some are yet to be encouraged to develop these. Tentative Lists can be helpful in the planning process in identifying potential sites and allowing adequate preparation time for their nomination. Canada and the UK have been congratulated on their TL in their inclusion of trans-boundary (where nominations include a number of sites based on a theme but not necessarily in the same geographical area, e.g. Cave Paintings in Northern Spain) and trans-national sites (nominations where sites cross borders, such as the recently announced Frontier of the Roman Empire including Hadrian’s Wall.

Figure 1.1 The World Heritage Site inscription process
and sites in Germany) and the amount of public consultation that has been included in arriving at the list. Sites are nominated for inscription by the central government within the States Parties and must have been listed on the Tentative List (TL) for that country prior to nomination. Each States Party may nominate up to two sites each year, provided that one is a natural nomination. This represents a change from the decision taken in 2000 to limit nominations to one per annum, in an attempt to reduce the number of nominations from well-represented States Parties, such as China, Italy, Spain and India.

Once a site has been selected from the TL, again a matter of much local negotiation in terms of priority, then the nomination document can be prepared. This outlines the criteria for inscription, boundaries of the site and buffer zone (area immediately surrounding the resource) and as much detail as possible relating to the uniqueness and importance of the site resource. In addition, since 1996, a Management Plan must be presented to demonstrate how the integrity of the site and its universal value are to be presented, covering aspects such as transport, conservation and tourism activity. Advice is available from the World Heritage Centre and advisory bodies, such as ICOMOS-UK and IUCN-UK, within the States Party prior to this submission. The World Heritage Centre then arranges for the nomination to be independently evaluated by an expert representative from either one or both of the two Advisory Bodies mandated by the WHC: the International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS) and the International Union for the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources (IUCN), which respectively provide evaluations of the cultural and natural sites nominated. A third advisory body, that of the International Centre for the Study of the Preservation and Restoration of Cultural Property (ICCROM), an intergovernmental organization, provides the Committee with expert advice on the conservation of cultural sites and training activities.

Mission reports relating to conservation and management, reports on the cultural/scientific values, and consultations with specialists are used to produce detailed recommendations on a site. These are then studied by special panels of the respective Advisory Bodies and at these meetings recommendations are formulated which are later presented to the World Heritage Committee. The options are to recommend inscription, deferral (to seek further detail) or to reject the nomination. The WHC agreed that it would consider a maximum of 45 nominations per annum at their meeting in 2004, this to include any proposed extensions to already inscribed sites. The final step is for the formal inscription of the site as a WHS and committing it to being managed in accordance with the Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention. In some cases, sites are also immediately placed on the List of World Heritage in Danger, currently containing 34 WHS, when the resource is considered to be at
substantial risk of damage from situations such as war, flood or industrial activity or in need of major conservation measures and assistance to protect and maintain the values for which it was originally inscribed. The further implications of listing will be covered in future chapters of this text.

What is the current profile of the World Heritage List?

The first 12 World Heritage Sites (WHS) were inscribed on the World Heritage List (WHL) in 1978 and the total has risen now to contain 812. The profile is varied, with 628 cultural, 160 natural and 24 mixed (those meeting both cultural and natural criteria) WHS, representing 137 States Parties (UNESCO, 2005d). Initially nominations tended to initiate from built heritage in European settings, leading to a geographic bias towards this area (Cleere, 1998), though the Global Strategy of 1994 has made some headway in attempting to redress this imbalance and encourage nominations that meet other criteria and originate from less well represented States Parties and themes. Most recent properties to be inscribed include sites from Bahrain and the Republic of Moldova appearing on the WHL for the first time. A situation has arisen whereby a few States Parties represent the majority of the properties on the WHL, while others may have none. Indeed, the number of WHS listed by States Party ranges from zero to 34, with 43 currently having no sites inscribed. This issue will be discussed in further detail later in the chapter. In recent years, attempts have been made to identify such gaps in the WHL with reports from ICOMOS and IUCN specifically addressing this issue and suggesting amelioration techniques. One such suggestion has been to increase the number of trans-boundary nominations (IUCN, 2004) and to encourage the exchange of expertise in the preparation of nomination documents and conservation techniques.

Current issues surrounding WHS designation and management

The previous paragraphs have covered the technical process involved in attaining World Heritage Site status from UNESCO. In attempting to clarify a complex political and administrative process, a huge number of issues have come to the fore and require further discussion. The author is not attempting to answer these issues, merely to raise them to inform the debate in later chapters in the text.
Motivations

Why do States Parties nominate sites for inscription? Is it for the opportunity to access international conservation expertise and exchange, the true basis of the WH Convention, or is it for the perceived benefits of economic growth encouraged by increased tourism activity and opportunity to access the World Heritage Fund? Perhaps it is simply to gain the recognition and prestige associated with achieving this international accolade or maybe simply a matter of political esteem and pride. The motivations usually relate to the specific governmental aspirations within a States Party, be they prestige within Europe or financial in developing countries. Whatever the reasons, they are varied, debatable in their benefits and often politically intensified.

Implications of World Heritage listing

One of the more tangible ways of assessing the above might be to review the actual implications of listing – the benefits and costs, the opportunities and threats. This issue has naturally been the subject of debate (Hall and Piggin, 2001; English Heritage, 2005) as States Parties want to see clear benefit in exchange for the expense of mounting a nomination bid. This is a suggested list of the key implications as summarized from these authors:

- international recognition and accountability – international prestige, increased opportunities for promotion, improved quality standards on sites and accountability if on the List of World Heritage in Danger
- improved protection and management of site via the system of site specific management plans providing a framework for decision-making and participation in monitoring activities and participation in periodic reporting from UNESCO
- planning implications – rarely legislative but often key material planning consideration or some level of recognition
- new partnerships and projects – the opportunity to form ones, for example at Stonehenge where 70 bodies now work together on the site proposals, and potential access to funding via WH Fund or locally, international exchange of expertise and personnel
- economic and social improvement
- political and ethnic recognition, for example in former colonial territories
- increased tourism activity – potential increases in visitation dependent upon the existing levels, location, theme and promotion.

What is abundantly clear is that the greatest benefits to the resources themselves appear to follow where a clear planning structure is in
place and adherence to the site specific management plan and the UNESCO Operational Guidelines is set, rather than in countries with less developed planning and management frameworks. IUCN (2004) have commented that there is a need for national legislation relevant to World Heritage that is complementary to and supportive of other laws on protected areas and natural resource management, with management plans for each property and the inclusion of an assessment of management effectiveness as part of the management cycle.

Tourism activities at WHS

The key focus of this book concerns the role of tourism within the much wider resource management practices. The perceived benefits of tourism activity to an area are one of the key motivations for States Parties in nominating sites. Various authors (Shackley, 1998; Hall and Piggin, 2001) have debated the actual economic impacts of listing, to gauge the role of designation in any achieved increases in visitation and income generation, though none has arrived conclusively in support of such benefits – usually due to a lack of data available for even the most developed sites. The key dilemma here is that it is difficult to balance tourism activity with the conservation role, often creating a tension or conflict between the usually large number of stakeholders involved. Each of the stakeholders is likely to hold conflicting agendas and priorities, resulting in difficulties arriving at consensus of opinion on site and resource management. McKercher et al. (2005) have researched this conflict between tourism and other stakeholders, stating that ‘tourism and cultural heritage management often have an awkward relationship’, then go on to suggest that formal partnerships may not be the best route to success, indeed that ‘successful cultural tourism is most likely to occur when both sets of stakeholders have a realistic appreciation of the tourism value of the asset, the need to conserve core cultural values and clearly defined roles’.

‘The very reasons why a property is chosen for inscription on the WHL are also the reasons why millions of tourists flock to those sites year after year. So how do we merge our convictions with our concerns over the impact of tourism on World Heritage Sites?’ (Pedersen, 2002). Their response has been for UNESCO and the advisory bodies of IUCN and ICOMOS to publish a range of texts and manuals to assist in directing site managers (Feilden and Jokilehto, 1998; Pederson, 2002), though often it might not be the practical management issues that require guidance, more intervention or encouragement to change attitudes from purely conservation to the wider context. Additionally, the sheer variety in resources, locations and staff expertise dictates that these publications are more generalist than specific and may not offer particularly practical solutions to
each individual, ‘unique’ WHS. The clearest route to balancing these activities would appear to be in the effective inclusion of them within management plans and recognition of management practices that can be used to control and maximize the benefits. It is vital that the management of WHS should be integrated into tourism and land management plans at all levels – local, regional and national.

Representation and balance on the WHL

One critical flaw in the WHS listing process is that UNESCO does not nominate nor invite nominations for sites that they deem appropriate – instead it is the central governments within each States Party that do this. This inevitably leads to a situation whereby some countries are not members, do not recognize membership and designation following political changes, or indeed nominate sites at all. Additionally, the highly politicized process of Tentative List and nomination means that it is not always the most obvious resource that is nominated. van der Aa (2005) suggests that this may be due to a variety of reasons including, social unrest, availability of exploitable resources on a site, overlooking suitable sites in error or attempts to exclude a minority’s heritage. The political will must be there for the nomination of sites to become a priority and be awarded the required funds to enable it to happen. Additionally, the political nature of UNESCO incurs a situation noted by Harrison (2005) where ‘on the World Heritage List … the outcomes will depend on the balance of status and power at any one time and on who among the numerous stakeholders has the loudest voice … it is an inter-subjective and highly political process’.

As mentioned previously, the WHL is more biased to sites in Europe and North America and towards cultural sites. The Global Strategy, set up in 1994 to encourage a balanced, representative and credible WHL, has an action programme designed to identify and fill gaps in the WHL, and has been effective in encouraging nominations from new States Parties and a broader range of categories, for example industrial heritage, heritage routes and cultural landscapes, but there are still opportunities for improvement. Future plans include further broadening of categories possibly to include community involvement and the engagement of young people in the process. Also, to encourage representation from less well represented States Parties via trans-national and trans-boundary nominations, though with a precursor that they need additional assistance with the preparation and implementation of management plans, ‘increasing use of serial site and trans-boundary nominations by a number of States Parties is positive but needs clearer direction and guidelines to ensure strong nomination and effective management post-inscription’ (IUCN, 2005).
One further future issue for UNESCO is that of adequate funding fully to support the activities of the WH Centre. The funds raised through the WHF are inadequate, particularly as more sites are designated in less developed countries and with the increasing cost of policing the now large number of sites. Calls for further research to inform the practices of the Centre (Harrison and Hitchcock, 2005) would also require increased levels of funding, most effectively via ICOMOS and IUCN, which can call on superior professional and scientific advice in an efficient and effective manner.

The process of WHS inscription

The whole process of inscription has been criticized for its complexity, political bias and expense. These may represent the key reasons why some countries fail to have representation on the WHL. ICOMOS (2004) suggest that the structural gaps are the result of a ‘lack of technical capacity to promote and prepare nominations, lack of adequate assessments of heritage properties, or lack of an appropriate legal or management framework, which either individually or collectively hinders the preparation of successful nominations’ (ICOMOS, 2004) and that qualitative gaps are ‘associated with certain types or themes of properties’. So, further work is required in order to overcome these issues internationally, in identifying suitable sites and assessing their cultural assets for suitability. It also may take several nomination bids and many years for some sites to be inscribed, often due to factors outside their control, such as redefinition of criteria or political wrangling. It may take years for a site even to make it onto a Tentative List, often it is particularly difficult for regions to gain recognition on national lists. Personnel changes and budgetary controls may mean that the sheer will to push for nomination may expire. Many States Parties do not have Tentative Lists in place, therefore automatically precluding them from nominating sites, while most WHS designated pre-1996 still do not have management plans in place. The lack of legislative power associated with designation is the key factor in much of this, both at international and national level. It allows questionable activities, such as planning approval for roads and housing or mining activity, to take place at or near designated WHS and frustrates experts seeking recognition and care for worthy resources. Hitchcock (2005) views this ‘legal ambiguity’ to be one of the key issues of the whole system. Additionally, there is also the confusion raised where a WHS is also awarded other designations. Since the WHConvention was set up there has been a great increase in the volume and applicability of other schemes for recognition and conservation of resources, such as national designations and the use of different terminology to discuss the same
item, e.g. World Heritage Areas/World Heritage Sites in Australia. These designations rarely follow identical boundaries, purposes and management practices – all contributing to the multiplicity of stakeholders.

**Total number of WHS and future completion of the WHL**

Both IUCN and ICOMOS completed investigations into the future of the WHL and voiced, interestingly conflicting, statements regarding their positions. While ICOMOS (2004) state that there should be:

no limit on the number of properties inscribed on WHL – the definition of potential properties to be nominated will necessarily remain an open question, subject to evolving concepts, policies, strategies and available resources ... and the perception of whether or not there are gaps, cannot simply be based on numerical analysis.

IUCN (2004) counter that:

there must be a finite number of existing and potential properties for inclusion on the WHL ... IUCN considers that a number in the range of 250–300 natural and mixed WH properties should be sufficient.

The IUCN statement (IUCN, 2004) goes on to say: ‘it was never intended that the WHL should ensure complete representivity of all the earth’s ecosystems and habitats – other international instruments available’. One area that they do agree on, however, is that Tentative Lists need more work to assist in the further identification of potential natural and mixed properties in particular, with further harmonization at regional and thematic level between States Parties being one avenue for development. So the debate is likely to continue in terms of arriving at a fully geographically and thematically representative WHL, with continued discussion of the contentious idea of re-evaluating existing sites, removal of those no longer deemed to be of ‘universal value’ and of compulsory nomination of sites from non-member nations. Existing and new political situations may also become volatile and impact on the progress of WHS management, for example between Korea and China or Israel and Palestine.

A lack of public awareness surrounds the whole aspect of designation too, the author has lost count of the number of times she has been asked if Scotland even has any WHS! People often ask why sites do or do not have the status, usually in complete ignorance of what it even means – though it sounds good, doesn’t it? This is particularly true in local contexts, as noted by Williams (2005).
Conclusion

An action plan to address some of these issues has been drafted by ICOMOS (2004) and includes: developing Tentative Lists for all States Parties; optimizing success of nominations; developing new Operational Guidelines; encouraging sustainable development on WHS; the introduction of periodic reporting to monitor WH; and raising awareness of the WHConvention.

The key aim of the WHConvention is to conserve cultural and natural heritage resources, but does the present structure of the WHC and associated processes actually do this? According to IUCN (2004) and ICOMOS (2004) the WHConvention is an effective framework for implementation of conservation strategies but needs better integration of Convention and international, national and regional conservation instruments, to achieve universal membership of Convention and to involve communities. This would indicate that it is effective, but then again both organizations are closely affiliated with and bound by UNESCO. Independent commentators might have reservations, but a realistic view must be taken regarding how improvements could be made to such an international, politically sensitive system. The chapters following this one investigate the issues surrounding the effective management and conservation of WHS, with the case studies then highlighting particular features of the issues applied in key WHS. In reading the following chapters and cases, it is critical to emphasize that the role of designation is not specific to tourism, rather for conservation, although there is also a need to recognize the significant role of tourism in the effective sustainable management of World Heritage Sites. As stated by Barbosa (2003), ‘We have a collective responsibility to safeguard our human heritage. It is a responsibility, furthermore, that links past, present and future generations in a chain of reciprocity and care’, and tourism has a vital role to play in that future.

References


