World Heritage – an honour and an obligation

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Some caveats about the speaker
SCOPE OF TALK

• An introduction to World Heritage

• What’s involved in getting a site on the WH list, and managing it?

• The benefits of WH

• Threats to WH sites
Reality check:

Three important things to take away from the seminar

1. making a successful nomination is tough
2. the standards are very high - success is not guaranteed
3. if a site is inscribed, it comes with important obligations – inscription is only the start
The idea of World Heritage

- Some places are so important to humanity that we think of them as being for everyone forever
- “World Heritage sites belong to all the peoples of the world, irrespective of the territory on which they are located” (UNESCO WH Web site)
- Such sites have Outstanding Universal Value
History of the convention

- 1950s and 1960s – emergence of global heritage and global nature conservation movements
- 1972 – Stockholm UN Conference on Human Environment
- 1972 – UNESCO’s “Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage” (*World Heritage Convention*) signed
- 1972-2013 - 190 State Parties (SP) sign WHC and have inscribed 981 sites
Cultural sites
Natural sites
‘Mixed’ sites
Number of World Heritage properties (2013)

- Cultural: 759
- Natural: 193
- Mixed: 29

Total: 981
Distribution of World Heritage Properties by World Regions (2013)

- Africa - 88
- Arab States - 74
- Asia and Pacific - 221
- Europe and North America - 469
- Latin America and Caribbean - 129

47.8%
Some achievements of the WHC

• Nearly every country belongs
• Most members have sites on the List
• The Convention has:
  – Achieved a high profile
  – Raised status of natural and cultural heritage
  – Brings natural and cultural heritage together
  – Helped build capacity in heritage management
  – Mobilised international assistance
  – Saved sites from threats, restored others
But there are some difficult questions

• How good is the coverage? Is it balanced?
• What is ‘enough’? Is the WH “brand” being devalued?
• How well are WH sites protected?
• Do countries fulfil their responsibilities?
• Does the focus on nomination overshadow needs of management?
What’s involved in getting a site on the WH list?
The main actors in the nomination process

State Parties
(identify, nominate, report and protect WH sites)

World Heritage Committee
(21 members meet annually)

WH Centre
(secretariat)

Advisory Bodies
ICOMOS
IUCN
The process for getting on to the WH List – ‘inscription’

1. Tentative list
2. Nomination file
3. Advisory Body evaluation (ICOMOS, IUCN)
4. World Heritage Committee decision
NB – ask UNESCO and Advisory Bodies for advice in preparing nominations

• “States Parties are invited to contact the Advisory Bodies and the World Heritage Centre at the earliest opportunity in considering nominations to seek information and guidance”

• There’s lots of on-line guidance
Nomination file

• Identification and description
• Justification
  – statement of OUV
  – 10 criteria (6 cultural, 4 natural)
  – comparative analysis (national and international)
  – authenticity/integrity
• State of conservation and threats
• Protection and management
• Monitoring (indicators etc.)

NB: Estimated cost of Nominations in UK: up to €500,000
The core concept: Outstanding Universal Value

• “Cultural and/or natural significance which is so exceptional as to transcend national boundaries and to be of common importance for present and future generations of all humanity”
The key tests of OUV: 10 criteria used for nomination and evaluation (from Operational Guidelines)

(i) Masterpiece of human creative genius
(ii) Important interchange of human values in respect of architecture, technology etc.
(iii) Unique or exceptional testimony to cultural tradition or civilization
(iv) Outstanding building, architectural or technological ensemble or landscape
(v) Outstanding example of traditional human settlement, land-use, or sea-use
(vi) Associated with outstanding events, living traditions, ideas or beliefs
(vii) Superlative natural phenomena or exceptional natural beauty
(viii) Outstanding example of earth's history, record of life, landform processes and features
(ix) Significant ongoing ecological and biological processes
(x) Significant natural habitats for conservation of biological diversity
"To be deemed of Outstanding Universal Value, a property must also meet the conditions of integrity and/or authenticity and must have an adequate protection and management system to ensure its safeguarding"
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Feb. Year 1 to June/July Year 2
Management of WH sites

• Each State Party will: “ensure the identification, protection, conservation, presentation and transmission to future generations of the cultural and natural heritage ..... will do all it can to this end, to the utmost of its own resources ...”

• The aim: maintain qualities for which site was inscribed – its OUV

• Often inscription comes with recommendations

• WH Committee monitors ‘State of Conservation’

• SP accountable for management, with international oversight

• WH Centre and Advisory Bodies can assist

NB there is much advice on line
Brú na Bóinne - Archaeological Ensemble of the Bend of the Boyne
What are the benefits of World Heritage status?
The UNESCO view of benefits

• Better protection
• Greater prestige for sites and institutions
• Higher tourist profile
• Easier to get funding
• More associated economic activity
• Better monitoring and inspection
The benefits don’t come automatically

- PricewaterhouseCoopers examined 6 UK WH sites (2007)
- “Our research shows that the impact WHS status makes on visitor motivations is usually very marginal... there is little evidence that becoming a WHS automatically generates additional visitors”
- Rebanks consulting (2009): “World Heritage status achieves little automatically... But some (sites)... that have tried to achieve benefits appear to have used World Heritage designation with value”
Case study 1: Blaenavon, South Wales (2000)
What has happened since WH designation?

• £30.8m regeneration grant
• Property prices up 300% in 5 years
• 100% rise in visitor levels over 5 years
• 100 new jobs p.a. in construction; 65 FTE in tourism
• New businesses created
• Much dereliction removed
• Big Pit museum = generates £4.93m p.a.
• Growth of community pride
Case Study 2
The Dorset and East Devon Coast (2001)
185 million years of the earth’s history
150 kms
2 counties
What has happened since WH designation?

- New tourist businesses
- LA bus service runs along coast
- Sea cruises to look at cliffs (40-50,000 visits p.a.)
- Much new tourist literature
- Major expansion of education in earth sciences
- 82% local residents and businesses say it has a positive effect
- The Jurassic Coast has national recognition
Case Study 3: Ilulissat Icefjord, Greenland (2004)
What has happened since WH designation?

• Rising pressures from tourism
• Problems of erosion, crowding, waste disposal
• Encouraged by UNESCO, Management Plan prepared with public input covering:
  commercial hunting, motorized vehicles, navigation, recreational activities, research and information
• Improvements have followed
• But climate change a far bigger issue
Threats to World Heritage
The threats to World Heritage are many

• Armed conflict and war
• Earthquakes (C) and other natural disasters
• Pollution
• Poaching (N)
• Invasive species (N)
• Climate change and sea level rise
• Mining
• Uncontrolled urbanization and infrastructure
• Unchecked tourist development
• Neglect
• Lack of public and political support
• And more ......
Dealing with threats to WH sites

Threats identified through Periodic Reporting and Reactive Monitoring

Expert advice from Advisory Bodies

WH Committee reviews options

- Put site on the WH In Danger list
- Advise and/or assist SP
- Remove site from WH list
Case Study 1: The Arabian Oryx Sanctuary, Oman
Short history

- Successful reintroduction of Arabian oryx in 1980s
- Inscribed 1994 (450 pairs oryx)
- By 1997: oryx number 65 (4 breeding pairs)
- Poaching rife, no protection, reserve reduced by 90%, oil exploration allowed
- 2007: WH Committee “expressed regret that the SP ... failed to fulfil its obligations ..... as defined by the World Heritage Convention”
- And removed site from the WH list (the first delisting)
Case Study 2 – the rice terraces of the Philippines (1992)
What has happened since designation?

• Loss of traditional skills etc.
• Neglect and erosion of terraces
• Put on World Heritage in Danger List (2001)
• National and international assistance provided
• Removed from In Danger list in 2013
Case study 3: the Giants
Causeway/Antrim Coast
Short history

- Inscribed in 1986
- 2002: WH Committee concerned re piecemeal tourism development
- 2003: UNESCO/IUCN mission recommends unified management and buffer zone
- NI government, local authority, private developers and NT struggle to find solution
- By 2008: NT gets control of key parts of site
- 2013: new visitor centre opened
The Runkerry Golf Resort threat

- Lies SW of G.C.
- Approved March 2012
- NT sought Judicial Review
  ... (it) would have a significant landscape and visual impact.... compromising the setting for the WHS
- March 2013: IUCN mission: “the impacts ....on the OUV of the WHS appear sufficiently significant that the development of the golf course should not be permitted...”
- June 2013: WHC urges UK to: “halt the proposed golf resort development project until its potential impact on the OUV of the property has been thoroughly assessed”
What lessons do we draw for those on the Irish Tentative List?
The Burren
Some downbeat conclusions

• Securing WH status is not easy – it needs time, effort, money (+ local support)

• Success is not guaranteed: not every TL site gets to nomination, and nominations sometimes fail

• Inscription comes with big obligations – it’s the start, not the finish!
Some upbeat conclusions

• WH status is indeed an honour

• It can be used to:
  – strengthen site protection
  – help generate green tourism and other sustainable forms development
  – help raise the status of heritage protection generally
  – strengthen education, training etc.
  – engage more with the local community

• You become part of global family