

IUCN EVALUATION OF WORLD HERITAGE NOMINATIONS:

Guidelines for Reviewers of Cultural Landscapes - The Assessment of Natural Values in Cultural Landscapes

A Note by IUCN¹

Background

The inclusion of cultural landscapes within the scope of the World Heritage Convention in 1993 was an important step in recognising the complex and often mutually-supportive role of nature and culture, and helped to bring the natural and cultural elements of the Convention closer together. While cultural landscapes are considered under the cultural criteria (i-vi) rather than the natural criteria (vii-x), IUCN nonetheless played an important role in introducing this new concept to the Convention and welcomed this development.

ICOMOS, IUCN and the WH Centre have drawn up an agreement on the procedure for the assessment of nominations for cultural landscapes. The main purpose of this note is to assist IUCN in undertaking such assessments, and in answering two questions in particular:

- what are the natural values of cultural landscapes? and
- how should these values be assessed?

Though mainly prepared for IUCN's own guidance in the assessment of cultural landscapes, the advice may also be helpful to States Parties to the Convention for the nomination of cultural landscapes. It has been tested in draft in recent years, both in the field and at a number of meetings. This note incorporates the lessons learnt.

The Assessment of Natural and Cultural Values in Cultural Landscapes

Under the WH Convention, there are criteria for the assessment of natural sites (paras. 77-78 of the Operational Guidelines²). However, cultural landscapes are designated under Article 1 of the Convention (cultural properties), not Article 2 (natural properties) to which the aforesaid criteria apply. Moreover, the criteria developed specifically for natural sites are of limited value in assessing nominations for cultural landscapes, whose characteristics are different (although natural criterion (vii), concerning "areas of exceptional natural beauty and aesthetic importance", is certainly relevant to the assessment of cultural landscapes also).

¹ This note was approved by the IUCN World Heritage Panel in April 2001 and last updated in August 2006 to reflect changes in the Operational Guidelines.

² References are to the 2005 Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention available at: <http://whc.unesco.org/en/guidelines>. The Operational Guidelines deal with cultural landscapes in para. 47 as well as paras. 6-13 of Annex 3.

Thus the situation at present is anomalous. The Operational Guidelines explicitly recognise that cultural landscapes embrace "a diversity of manifestations of the interaction between humankind and its natural environment" (para. 8 in Annex 3). However, while the criteria for assessing the cultural values of this interaction are clear and explicit (paras. 77-78), those for the natural ones are not. It is for this reason that IUCN had developed this informal guidance, with recommended criteria for assessing the natural values of cultural landscapes.

It is important to stress that these criteria do not replace the agreed natural criteria in the Operational Guidelines, which must be used to assess any site nominated under natural criteria (vii-x). Their sole purpose is to identify the extent of IUCN's interest in cultural landscapes, sites which will of course be formally inscribed only under cultural criteria (i-vi).

Nature in Cultural Landscapes

The close interest that IUCN has in cultural landscapes derives from the importance of many cultural landscapes to the conservation and evolution of nature and natural resources. While this may be a characteristic of any of the types of cultural landscapes listed under para. 10 in Annex 3 of the Operational Guidelines, in practice it is likely to be most important in the case of continuing, organically evolved landscapes. On the other hand, there will be some cultural landscapes in which IUCN's interest will be small, or non-existent.

The various natural qualities of cultural landscapes are well summarised in the Operational Guidelines³:

“Cultural landscapes often reflect specific techniques of sustainable land use, considering the characteristics and limits of the natural environment they are established in, and a specific spiritual relationship to nature. Protection of cultural landscapes can contribute to modern techniques of sustainable land use and can maintain or enhance natural values in the landscape. The continued existence of traditional forms of land use supports biological diversity in many regions of the world. The protection of traditional cultural landscapes is therefore helpful in maintaining biological diversity" (para. 9 in Annex 3, with emphasis added).”

In addition to these important aspects, there may also be other natural qualities apparent in a cultural landscape:

- outstanding natural beauty and aesthetic values (similar to those found in some natural sites of world heritage quality, but where such values derive as much from the contrast, and/or interaction, between the works of nature and of humankind as from the intrinsic quality of the natural features),
- evidence of a uniquely informative past relationship between humanity and nature (this may not necessarily a positive relationship),
- important biodiversity resources may be found both in wild species of fauna and flora, and in domesticated animals and cultivated crops.

³ References are to the Operational Guidelines as at 2005.

Criteria for Assessing Natural Qualities of Cultural Landscapes.

Against this background, IUCN will have the following criteria in mind when assessing cultural landscapes.

- 1 *conservation of biodiversity in wild nature:* and in particular whether the cultural landscape is an outstanding example of how traditional land use patterns can:
 - contribute to the protection of natural ecosystems (e.g. by providing for the protection of watershed forests),
 - help support wild species of fauna or flora,
 - help protect genetic diversity within wild species,
 - create semi-natural habitats of great importance to biodiversity, i.e. manipulated ecosystems with well-structured and functional interactions between its living components.

- 2 *conservation of biodiversity within farming systems:* and in particular whether the cultural landscape is an outstanding example of how traditional farm systems can:
 - develop and/or conserve a wide range of varieties of domesticated livestock,
 - develop and/or conserve a wide range of varieties of cultivated crops, such as cereals, fruit or root vegetables.

- 3 *sustainable land use:* and in particular whether the land use practices are an outstanding example of how to:
 - respect land capability,
 - conserve the quality and quantity of soil,
 - manage rainwater,
 - safeguard water quality
 - reduce run-off,
 - maintain plant cover.

- 4 *enhancement of scenic beauty:* that is whether the cultural landscape has outstanding scenic qualities, deriving as much from the contrast and/or interaction between the works of nature and humanity as from the intrinsic quality of the natural features themselves.

- 5 the presence of an outstanding *ex situ collection* of plants (herbarium, botanic gardens) or of fauna (e.g. collection of waterfowl).
- 6 evidence of an *outstanding example of humanity's inter-relationship with nature*. IUCN may be interested if there is evidence of either a successful or failed relationship between a past civilisation and the natural resources on which it depended.
- 7 the site of some *historically-significant discovery* in the natural sciences, i.e. where the associative value derives from such a discovery.

The following table places each of the above criteria against the categories of cultural landscapes set out in para. 10 in Annex 3 of the Operational Guidelines, thereby indicating where they are most likely to occur. The absence of a criterion does not mean that it will *never* be relevant in the landscape type concerned, but it would not normally be significant.

<i>Cultural Landscape type</i>	<i>Natural criteria most likely to be relevant</i>			
Designed landscape				
Organically evolving landscape - continuous	vii	viii	ix	x
Organically evolving landscape - fossil		viii		
Associative landscape	vii			

Finally, it should be added that other requirements, e.g. with regard to integrity, and also the existence of a management plan and of long-term legislative, regulatory or institutional protection (paras. 87-119 of the Operational Guidelines) will be as relevant to IUCN in examining cultural landscapes as in the assessment of natural properties. However, the concept of integrity obviously has a different application in lived-in landscapes. It is integrity of the relationship with nature that matters, not the integrity of nature itself.

Conclusion

IUCN has developed the above as guidance on the assessment of the natural qualities of cultural landscapes. In its evaluation of cultural landscapes nominated for inclusion on the World Heritage List, IUCN is mostly interested in the integrity and management of the natural qualities at a landscape level, and the relationship between humanity and nature. IUCN would welcome comments from reviewers and others in order to further refine the advice contained herein.

Reviewers should base their comments on cultural landscape nominations on the nomination file, their knowledge of the nominated property, and/or any additional information readily available to them. Please note that to avoid confusion in the evaluation process reviewers should however not contact the State Party or management of the nominated property for information. Such contact will be made by the ICOMOS (and IUCN if any) field evaluators during the evaluation mission, or may be followed up by ICOMOS and/or IUCN through letters if required.