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THE WORLD HERITAGE CONVENTION, PARKS CANADA AND QUEBEC CITY: THEY HAVE SOMETHING IN COMMON

François Leblanc*

Kluane, The Rocky Mountains, Nahanni, l'Anse-aux-Meadows, Wood Buffalo: what do they have in common? They are 5 of the 9 sites Canada has listed on the World Heritage List, and they are National Parks under the care of Parks Canada.

The other Canadian sites are Anthony Island, Head-Smashed-In Bison Jump, Dinosaur Park and Quebec City. The U.S. has a dozen properties listed on the World Heritage List, among which we find Yellowstone, Mesa Verde, the Grand Canyon, the Everglades, Independence Hall, Wrangell-St. Elias, Redwood, Mammoth Cave and Cahokia Mounds.

Of course, because you are a preservationist, you know all about these world famous buildings and sites nominated by your country . . . If you are not too sure, I suggest that you write to Parks Canada or the U.S. National Park Service; they have all the information that you might require.

What I would like to do here, is take you step by step through the process of nominating a property to the World Heritage Convention using a practical example, the City of Quebec, which was officially put on the World Heritage List in December 1985. I believe that this practical example will help you to understand the importance and the mechanism of the World Heritage convention, Parks Canada's international role as the official body responsible for all Canadian nominations to the World Heritage List and some of the preservation related problems in implementing this Convention.

The Convention: An On-Going Process

The World Heritage Convention is a convention signed by countries. They basically agree to protect, for the benefit of the present and future generations, the properties located within their political boundaries which would be recognized by the rest of the world as

being of outstanding universal significance. It is definitely not the Twentieth Century's response to the Seven Wonders of the World. Rather, it is a significant step towards recognizing that the heritage of mankind goes beyond the geopolitical boundaries of nations.

The process begins in a country which has signed the Convention. It prepares a nomination and brings it to the international table set up every year by UNESCO (United Nations Education, Science and Culture Organization). There, in front of all other participating nations, the property is evaluated for outstanding universal significance, and, if it meets the various criteria, is put on the World Heritage List.

Why?

Why would nations want to do this? There is no simple answer to this question: pride, politics, propaganda, altruism, science, genuine preservationism. It varies from nation to nation, but generally speaking, they all recognize that the cultural and natural heritage of mankind belongs to mankind and the nations of today are the custodians of these outstanding properties for future generations; they do not own them. The concept of international heritage and international cooperation for its safeguard is a reality. The World Heritage Convention is one of the mechanisms to make it happen.

What if a World Heritage Site is not Properly Preserved?

Then, the other nations will try to help. The Convention has no "teeth"; it is founded on collaboration, trust and good will. The only constringent mechanism is to de-list a property which would have lost the fundamental characteristics for its inscription. Most of the properties listed on the World Heritage List are in need of important preservation work. A great

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number are in countries where there are few or no trained professional preservationists.

The Convention has not yet adopted a procedure for reporting and monitoring listed properties. A small committee of experts has been set up to find a solution. The fact that a few Canadians and Americans are on this committee is proof that North American expertise is internationally recognized.

The Nomination of Quebec City

Quebec City is a city in which Parks Canada has jurisdiction over major historic assets such as the fortification walls which encircle the original town and Artillery Park which contains many significant historic structures.

The idea to nominate this property (a whole city) originated in Paris, where, as Director of ICOMOS from 1979 to 1983, I was responsible for organizing the various meetings where properties were evaluated for the World Heritage Convention by ICOMOS (The International Council on Monuments and Sites). Jacques Dalibard, Executive Director of the Heritage Canada Foundation and then also Treasurer-General of ICOMOS, and myself had reviewed and recommended for inscription on the List several properties such as Ouro Preto in Brazil, La Valette in Malta, Ohrid in Yugoslavia, Havana in Cuba, which offered qualities that could easily be matched by Quebec City. So we thought: why not give it a try. . .

We discussed the idea first with our colleagues from foreign countries at ICOMOS to get a feeling of how the nomination would be received; they were favourable. It is always a good idea to check first on an informal basis with the people responsible for the evaluation of the nomination.

Then three levels of Canadian government had to be convinced. The Mayor of Quebec, M. Pelletier went for it first. Representatives of the provincial government said they would support the idea, and Parks Canada, the federal agency designated to represent Canada on the World Heritage Convention, agreed to go ahead with the nomination. Strong of this political will, the technical work could begin.

The City of Quebec hired a consultant, Denis St-Louis, Architect, to implement the nomination process. A tri-level government working committee was set up and met regularly to *prepare* the standard nomination form supplied by UNESCO. The questionnaire requests information about the location of the property, its detailed description, inventory, ownership, state of conservation, legislation, funds for its maintenance, professional responsibility, etc.

Everything being relative the Quebec City nomination was well researched and prepared by a group of professionals of various backgrounds. But as one is preparing such nominations, one realizes the voids: Quebec City does not have an inventory of its historic buildings . . . but then nor had Cairo before they prepared their nomination nor Damascus. This nomination procedure has given a good opportunity for

the City of Quebec and the professionals living there to try and complete the documentation of this important North American city.

The Path to Nomination

Once the nomination form was ready, various steps to the final nomination by the World Heritage Committee had to be followed:

1. The nomination form was sent to UNESCO in Paris by Canada as an official nomination.
2. All nominations received before December 31 of each year are processed in the following 12 months. UNESCO's Secretariat examines the nomination file to make sure that all requested documents are included, and then forwards it to ICOMOS if it is a cultural property or IUCN (The International Union for the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources) if it is a natural site.

Both organizations are non-governmental organizations of professionals. They have been designated by the countries party to the Convention as their advisers.

It is recognized that it would have been quite difficult to really assess Russia's comments on U.S. nominations or Libya's comments on Israel's nominations if government representatives had been left by themselves to evaluate the nominations. The idea of asking these two independent non political organizations to assess the nominations got around this difficulty.

3. The nomination is forwarded by UNESCO to ICOMOS. There, it goes through a preliminary evaluation by ICOMOS' Convention Coordinator. He consults various experts on each nomination and then prepares a draft recommendation on one of the following options:
 - a. That the property be included on the World Heritage List.
 - b. That the property not be included.
 - c. That the nomination be deferred for one reason or another.

The most common reasons for deferring a nomination are lack of information supplied by the State party, a property insufficiently studied or researched, lack of precision concerning the degree of protection of the property, the impact of new construction being built near by, the absence of any development or management plan, or the existence of other properties in the same country known to be more representative.

The draft evaluation is reviewed by a committee of 5 to 8 specialists within ICOMOS. They basically represent the major cultural areas of the world.

In the case of Quebec's nomination, it was deferred for one year. At the time Quebec was nominated, it appeared that the town planning criteria for selecting entire cities was too general. As a result, every country was beginning to nominate its capital city. Once the criteria was tightened, Quebec was reintroduced by ICOMOS, and could then be evaluated.

4. The ICOMOS recommendation is then sent to UNESCO who acts as the Convention's secretariat.

The Convention has two mechanisms to review the nominations: the COMMITTEE of the Convention, made up of 21 States out of the 100 that have signed it, and the BUREAU, made up of 6 States from the 21 of the COMMITTEE.

In May or June of each year, the BUREAU meets to review ICOMOS's and IUCN's professional recommendations. The discussions in the BUREAU meetings are generally quite lively. Members feel free to challenge the opinions of the professionals.

In October or November of each year, the COMMITTEE meets to review the BUREAU's report. It is the Committee that decides if a property is to be included on the World Heritage List or not. The one year cycle is now complete, and we can begin again with new nominations or nominations which have been deferred and are brought back for re-evaluation.

There are six criteria used to evaluate the cultural properties:

1. Represent a unique artistic achievement, a masterpiece of the creative genius;
2. have exerted great influence, over a span of time or within a cultural area of the world, on developments in architecture, monumental arts or town-planning and landscaping;
3. bear a unique or at least exceptional testimony to a civilization which has disappeared;
4. be an outstanding example of a type of structure which illustrates a significant stage in history;
5. be an outstanding example of a traditional human settlement which is representative of a culture and which has become vulnerable under the impact of irreversible change;
6. be directly and tangibly associated with events or with ideas or beliefs of outstanding universal significance,

AND MEET THE TEST OF AUTHENTICITY IN DESIGN, MATERIALS, WORKMANSHIP OR SETTING.

Quebec was nominated under two criteria:

- Quebec is the CRADLE OF FRENCH CIVILIZATION in America as Ohrid, Yugoslavia was for Balkan culture and Cairo, Egypt for the Abbassayade culture.
- Quebec is UNIQUE. It is the only fortified city in North America (Mexico being considered as part of Latin America in UNESCO's cultural concept) which still has a wall which surrounds it completely.

Everything is not Simple

Despite the seemingly straightforward approach to placing properties on the World Heritage List, several problems must be overcome.

Sometimes, getting expert advice is quite a problem. Experts in a specific field often have little mutual affection, or make a point of opposing each other. Fortunately, getting expert advice on Quebec City was not difficult and the Quebec City nomination file was one of the best ever submitted to UNESCO.

A second difficulty is credibility: if the Director of Antiquities of a country nominating a property is asked for his opinion when he has spent 15 or 20 years of his life studying that particular nominated property or site and has been paid by his government to do this research, what do you think his answer will be? What sort of credibility will his opinion have for the International Community? It is not always easy to find another expert from outside the nominating country to evaluate the nomination with the same level of understanding.

A third obstacle has to do with confidentiality. Take the case of some experts working in a foreign country in the framework of a bilateral governmental cultural exchange. The site on which they are working is being nominated to the World Heritage Convention and we have asked them their opinion. From professional to professional, they would tell us in confidence that, in their opinion, the nomination is not the best property to represent what it claimed, but if we were ever to mention this, they would deny it strongly and publicly because it would probably mean the end of their research programme. By making inquiries this way, one gets a good first-hand professional opinion, but it is very difficult to use it.

A fourth difficulty has to do with the lack of expertise and knowledge. Many architectural and archaeological remains of lost civilizations have not yet been fully studied in a scholarly way and therefore there are no acknowledged experts to assess their relative values.

Making comparisons between elements or cultural values is also a major difficulty. Our colleagues from the International Union for the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources (IUCN) have an advantage over us in this respect. When they say that a species of animal is endangered because the conditions for its reproduction are no longer guaranteed, this is a fact that can be verified; or when they state that a certain natural park contains the greatest number of skeletons and remains of dinosaurs in the whole world, this is also a measurable element and comparisons can be made. The most significant in terms of quantity and size are criteria often used by IUCN.

The World Heritage COMMITTEE expects similar comparisons to be made in the field of culture. Why should we consider so many cathedrals, castles, archaeological sites, mosques or colonial buildings? Is not one of each sufficient to illustrate each culture or type of architecture? Can we not decide which is most representative and leave it at that? The answer is no. Culture is not, and cannot be, considered in terms of quantity and size.

The Gothic or Romanesque cathedrals which contain most stones do not necessarily have an important cultural significance, nor does the largest Roman archaeological site in terms of size.

The six criteria used in the Convention to establish what is of outstanding universal significance are well defined. What cannot be defined by the Convention is how to compare cultural elements and values. For

instance, if we take the case of historic towns or city centres: how many are really of outstanding universal significance? How many are really necessary to have on the World Heritage List before we can say that we have a significant sampling? How can we really compare the 350-year-old historic town of Quebec to the 400-year-old Ouro Preto in Brazil with its Baroque colonial architecture, Islamic Cairo in Egypt which is over 1000 years old and offers marvels of Islamic architecture, and the historic centre of Rome in Italy which is over 2500 years old and contains hundreds of treasures such as St Peter's and the Pantheon. Which is most significant? Can we establish a hierarchy between these historic centres without establishing a parallel hierarchy between cultures and civilizations?

As the official government representative to the World Heritage Convention, Parks Canada is responsible for the Canadian nominations. The fact that all of its 9 nominations have been successfully placed on the

World Heritage List attests not only for the quality of sites within Canada's borders but also the high standards applied in the selection of suitable nominations.

Al Davidson, who just retired as head of the Parks Program, is the current official rapporteur (secretary) to the Convention. Although selected for his personal qualities, his appointment does reflect the high regard that Canada holds and the high level of Canadian participation in this most worthwhile international endeavour.

Editor's Note:

An important international symposium which will gather the Mayors and Town Planners of all the cities listed on the World Heritage List (35-40 cities) is in preparation. The symposium will be held in Quebec City in 1988 and will be sponsored by many Canadian organizations and institutions. The subject will be the management of historic towns listed on the World Heritage List.