



IUCN EVALUATION OF WORLD HERITAGE NOMINATIONS

Guidance for Desktop Reviewers

“Outstanding universal value means 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”

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- I. **CONTEXT**

IUCN and the evaluation of World Heritage nominations

Under the World Heritage Convention, IUCN is the technical advisory body to the World Heritage Committee on natural heritage. This is stated in articles 8, 13 and 14 of the Convention text and further detailed in the *Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the Convention* (referred to hereafter as the *Operational Guidelines*). IUCN provides several technical advisory services to the World Heritage Committee. One of these is the evaluation of natural and mixed properties nominated for inscription on the World Heritage List. Mixed properties are evaluated jointly with the International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS), one of the advisory bodies for cultural heritage. Furthermore, IUCN provides input to the evaluation of Cultural Landscapes evaluated by ICOMOS.

The guidance compiled in this paper refers to the evaluation process only, in particular to the external desktop reviews of nominations. It explains the context and objective of desktop reviews within the evaluation process and the role and tasks of desktop reviewers. Furthermore, this guidance explains the key aspects to be addressed and a format to structure the feedback by reviewers. While we hope the suggested format is useful, IUCN welcomes any observations on nominations and nominated sites from reviewers.

Reviewers are strongly encouraged to familiarize themselves with the Convention in general and the *Operational Guidelines* in particular as best they can. For easy reference we have thus included a brief overview to the key concepts and terms used in the World Heritage discussion as the final section.

Objectives of the desktop reviews

The independent and confidential desktop reviews are an indispensable component of the evaluation process. It allows IUCN to provide a sound and balanced evaluation of nominations by tapping on the wealth of technical and site-specific knowledge through the various networks. Otherwise, such knowledge would be unavailable in the process. There are many examples where desktop reviewers pointed out decisive issues which may otherwise have gone unnoticed.

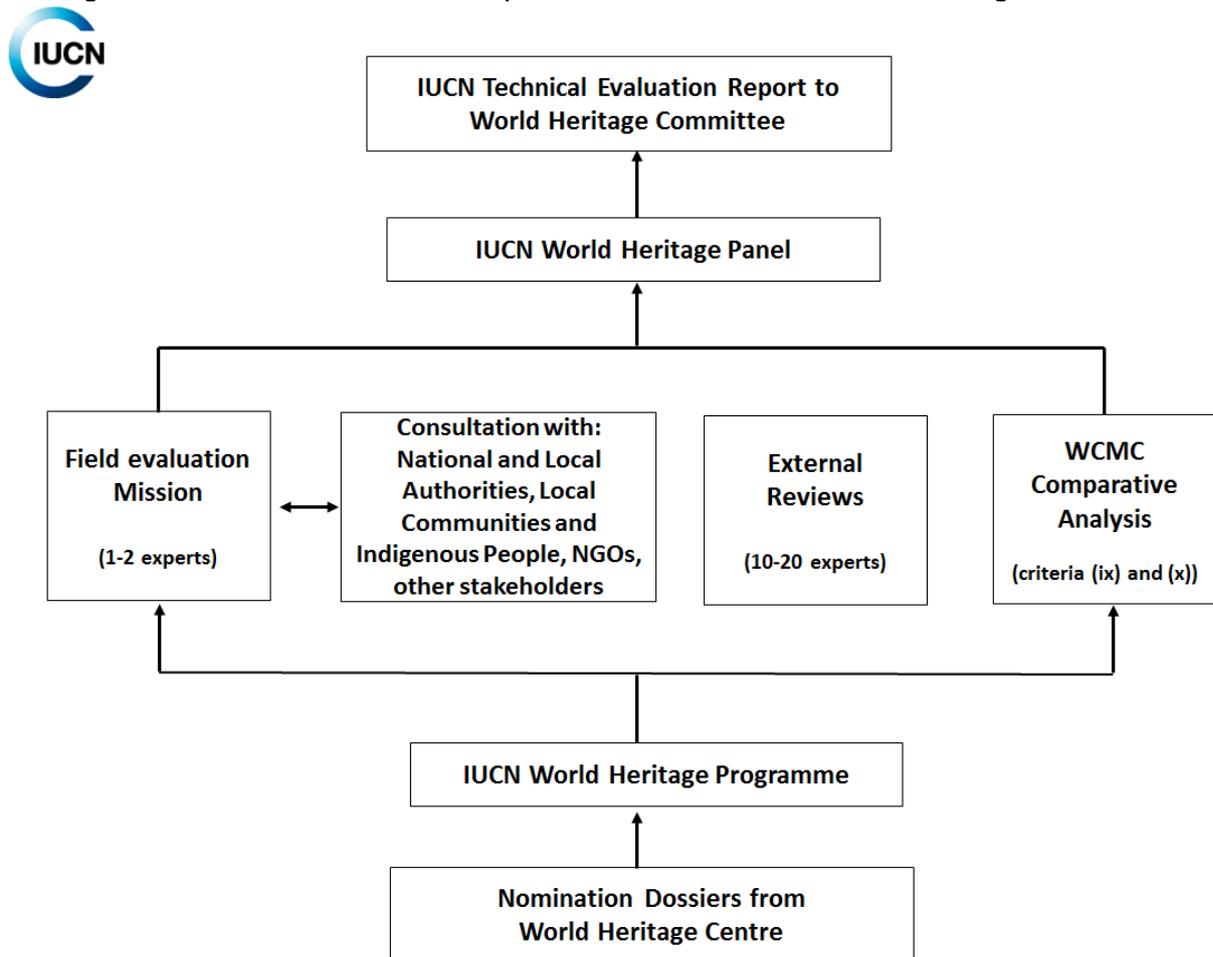
The selection of desk top reviewers

Voluntary experts are mainly drawn from members of IUCN Commissions, in particular the World Commission on Protected Areas (WCPA), and other and scientific networks, such as the International Association of Geomorphologists (IAG) and the International Union of Geological Sciences (IUGS). These experts must be in a position to comment on one or several nominated sites based on personal working experience at the site or with specific thematic or regional issues relevant to the nomination. Experts having a role in the nomination process on behalf of the nominating State Party are not eligible to serve as reviewers.

IUCN cannot financially compensate reviewers. Experts contribute on a voluntary basis and in doing so help identify and promote the conservation of the world’s most outstanding natural heritage. For WCPA members this is an ideal way to contribute to the WCPA network. IUCN is grateful for suggestions for additional external reviewers.

II. ROLE AND TASKS OF DESK TOP REVIEWS WITHIN THE IUCN EVALUATION

In carrying out the evaluation of nominations of natural and mixed properties, IUCN is guided by the evaluation procedure detailed in the *Operational Guidelines*. This procedure, including the role of the external desk top reviews, is visualized in the below figure.



IUCN evaluation procedure, positioning of desk top reviews highlighted
(Source: *Operational Guidelines*)

Potential reviewers are provided with the list of nominations of the corresponding year by email via the various networks and asked to carry out desktop reviews. Reviewers committing themselves to the task are provided electronic access to the nomination dossier through a password protected website. Reviewers should base their contribution on the nomination file, their knowledge of the nominated property, or property type or region and/or any additional information available to them and be objective, rigorous and scientific in their views. They are asked to convey all relevant observations. Desktop reviewers communicate exclusively with IUCN staff involved in the evaluation process and must not contact the State Party or management of the nominated property related to the evaluation. If desktop reviewers require additional information, they are kindly asked to contact IUCN.

All contributions are treated confidentially and only made available to the IUCN staff involved in the evaluation process, the IUCN World Heritage Panel and the IUCN field evaluators. No names will be made available in any form to the World Heritage Committee, the media or anybody else. All contributions are taken into consideration by the IUCN World Heritage Panel. This Panel conveys its recommendations to the World Heritage Committee based on the assessment of the various components presented in the above figure.

The World Heritage Convention aims at the identification, protection, conservation, presentation and transmission to future generations of cultural and natural heritage of outstanding universal value. This is the central concept of the World Heritage Convention and is defined in paragraph 49 of the Operational Guidelines to the Convention as follows:

‘Outstanding universal value means 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. As such, the permanent protection of this heritage is of the highest importance to the international community as a whole.

To be deemed of outstanding universal value, a property must also meet the conditions of integrity and must have an adequate protection and management system to ensure its safeguarding in addition to meeting World Heritage criteria (see paragraphs 77 and 78). In other words, the concept goes beyond values and is comprised of three integral elements or pillars. Reviewers should pay particular attention to these “**Three Pillars of Outstanding Universal Value**”:

- A. The nominated property’s compliance with **natural World Heritage criteria**;
- B. The nominated property’s compliance with **conditions of integrity**;
- C. The nominated property’s compliance with **requirements for protection and management**.

For further detailed guidance reviewers are asked to refer to the *Operational Guidelines*. For the convenience of reviewers the most important paragraphs are provided in the final section of this guidance.

A. Reviewing compliance with outstanding universal value criteria

1. Reviewers are asked to provide a considered judgment on whether the nominated site meets the natural World Heritage criteria (criteria VII, VIII, IX and X). For the purpose of the evaluation process the following levels serve as a reference for determining the significance of natural values of the nominated property. Some features might be “outstanding” at a more restricted scale but may fail to be so from a global perspective:

- **Global Significance:** Natural features, geological and physiographical formations and natural sites that are clearly unique and are not duplicated or surpassed anywhere in the world.
- **Regional Significance:** natural features, geological and physiographical formations and natural sites which are of limited distribution or the best examples of a feature in the region.
- **National Significance:** natural features, geological and physiographical formations and natural sites that are of limited distribution or are the best examples of a feature in the country.
- **Provincial Significance:** natural features, geological and physiographical formations and natural sites features which are of limited distribution at a

provincial level or are the best examples of a feature in the State, Province or Canton.

2. Reviewers are asked to provide a critical opinion on whether the nomination document correctly and fully demonstrates that the nominated property meets the natural World Heritage criteria.
3. Reviewers are asked to contribute to the comparative analysis, i.e. to evaluate the nominated properties in comparison with areas containing similar natural values at the national, regional and global level. A number of thematic overview studies that may be useful are available from the IUCN website.

B. Reviewing the nominated property's compliance with conditions of integrity

1. Reviewers are asked to assess whether the nominated property meets the conditions of integrity. If the conditions are not met in the view of reviewers, they are asked to state what would be necessary for the conditions to be met.
2. Integrity in a World Heritage context is "a measure of the wholeness and intactness".
3. The assessment should include whether the necessary elements and processes are represented, whether size and boundary design of the nominated property and its buffer zones and whether it "suffers from adverse effects of development and/or neglect".

C. Reviewing the nominated property's compliance with requirements for protection and management

1. Reviewers are asked to provide their judgment if the nominated property has adequate long-term legislative, regulatory, formal institutional and/or traditional protection and management in place to ensure that the outstanding universal value and the conditions of integrity are maintained.
2. Paragraphs 99 - 119 of the Operational Guidelines provide useful guidance on the various dimensions of management and protection, including on boundaries, zonation, management systems, participation and sustainable use.

Reviewers should please list references they consulted to support their assessment.

III. KEY TERMS AND CONCEPTS UNDER THE WORLD HERITAGE CONVENTION

We highly recommend that reviewers familiarize themselves with the Convention text and the *Operational Guidelines*. The latter are regularly updated so reviewers should refer to the latest version available. Both documents are available at the official website of the World Heritage Centre. The main terms and concepts defined in the *Operational Guidelines* are summarized in this section. Direct quotations are marked in italics.

Meeting the World Heritage Criteria:

This central concept of the World Heritage Convention is defined above. Furthermore, it is stated in paragraph 52 that:

The Convention is not intended to ensure the protection of all properties of great interest, importance or value, but only for a select list of the most outstanding of these

*from an international viewpoint. It is not to be assumed that a property of national and/or regional importance will automatically be inscribed on the World Heritage List.*⁵

According to article 2 of the World Heritage Convention, the following features are considered as natural World Heritage:

Natural features consisting of physical and biological formations or groups of such formations, which are of outstanding universal value from the aesthetic or scientific point of view;

geological and physiographical formations and precisely delineated areas which constitute the habitat of threatened species of animals and plants of outstanding universal value from the point of view of science or conservation;

natural sites or precisely delineated natural areas of outstanding universal value from the point of view of science, conservation or natural beauty.

The criteria for the assessment of outstanding universal value of natural properties

Out of the total of ten criteria defined in paragraph 77 of the *Operational Guidelines* four refer to natural heritage. The World Heritage Committee considers natural heritage as having outstanding universal value if the property meets one or more of the following **criteria**:

(vii) to contain superlative natural phenomena or areas of exceptional natural beauty and aesthetic importance;

(viii) be outstanding examples representing major stages of earth's history, including the record of life, significant on-going geological processes in the development of landforms, or significant geomorphic or physiographic features;

(ix) be outstanding examples representing significant ongoing ecological and biological processes in the evolution and development of terrestrial, fresh water, coastal and marine ecosystems and communities of plants and animals;

(x) contain the most important and significant natural habitats for in-situ conservation of biological diversity, including those containing threatened species of outstanding universal value from the point of view of science or conservation.

Compliance with conditions of integrity and requirements for management and Protection

The nominated property must also meet the *conditions of integrity*, defined in paragraph 88 as:

A measure of the wholeness and intactness of the natural and/or cultural heritage and its attributes. Examining the conditions of integrity therefore requires assessing the extent to which the property:

a) includes all elements necessary to express its outstanding universal value;

b) is of adequate size to ensure the complete representation of the features and processes which convey the property's significance;

c) suffers from adverse effects of development and/or neglect

This should be presented in a statement of integrity.

Furthermore, paragraph 97 states that:

All properties inscribed on the World Heritage List must have adequate long-term legislative, regulatory, institutional and/or traditional protection and management to ensure their safeguarding. This protection should include adequately delineated boundaries. Similarly States Parties should demonstrate adequate protection at the national, regional, municipal, and/or traditional level for the nominated property. They should append appropriate texts to the nomination with a clear explanation of the way this protection operates to protect the property.

Transboundary properties

For various reasons transboundary regions are often of particular conservation importance and at the same time politically sensitive. Transboundary conservation has been receiving increasing attention in response to the importance and the challenges of managing ecosystems across international borders, as well as an entry point for cooperation. Transboundary efforts deserve particular attention in a World Heritage Context because many existing or potential properties are located near international boundaries and because such sites ideally meet the cooperative spirit of the Convention.

Paragraphs 134 - 136 of the *Operational Guidelines* refer to these sites as follows:

Wherever possible, transboundary nominations should be prepared and submitted by States Parties jointly in conformity with Article 11.3 of the Convention. It is highly recommended that the States Parties concerned establish a joint management committee or similar body to oversee the management of the whole of a transboundary property.

Serial properties

Serial properties are referred to in paragraph 137 of the *Operational Guidelines*. These properties have two or more distinct, geographically separated areas that as a whole are of outstanding value. A lack of clarity on serial sites and a need to urgently address this information gap has been officially acknowledged by the World Heritage Committee. The World Heritage Centre, IUCN, ICOMOS and other partners are currently working on better guidance. In the current absence of more concrete guidance reviewers are asked to consider the following questions prepared by IUCN for serial property nominations:

- a) What is the justification for the serial approach?
- b) Are the separate component parts of the nominated property functionally linked in relation to the requirements of the *Operational Guidelines*?
- c) Is there an effective overall management framework for all the component parts of the nominated property?

Cultural Landscapes

Annex 3 of the *Operational Guidelines* defines Cultural landscapes as “*cultural properties*” representing the “*combined works of nature and of man*” designated in Article 1 of the *Convention*”. Paragraph 47 of the *Operational Guidelines* states that Cultural Landscapes “*are illustrative of the evolution of human society and settlement over time, under the influence of the physical constraints and/or opportunities presented by their natural environment and of successive social, economic and cultural forces, both external and internal*”.

Cultural Landscapes are nominated based on cultural criteria. While ICOMOS takes the lead in these evaluations, IUCN plays an important role in those cultural landscapes which have significant natural values. The various natural values of cultural landscapes are summarized in paragraph 9 in Annex 3 in the *Operational Guidelines*:

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.

Annex 3 of the *Operational Guidelines* distinguishes three main categories of Cultural Landscapes, namely:

(i) The most easily identifiable is the clearly defined landscape designed and created intentionally by man. This embraces garden and parkland landscapes constructed for aesthetic reasons which are often (but not always) associated with religious or other monumental buildings and ensembles.

(ii) The second category is the organically evolved landscape. This results from an initial social, economic, administrative, and/or religious imperative and has developed its present form by association with and in response to its natural environment. Such landscapes reflect that process of evolution in their form and component features. They fall into two sub-categories:

- a relict (or fossil) landscape is one in which an evolutionary process came to an end at some time in the past, either abruptly or over a period. Its significant distinguishing features are, however, still visible in material form.

- a continuing landscape is one which retains an active social role in contemporary society closely associated with the traditional way of life, and in which the evolutionary process is still in progress. At the same time it exhibits significant material evidence of its evolution over time.

(iii) The final category is the associative cultural landscape. The inscription of such landscapes on the World Heritage List is justifiable by virtue of the powerful religious, artistic or cultural associations of the natural element rather than material cultural evidence, which may be insignificant or even absent.

When evaluating the natural values of cultural landscapes IUCN is concerned with the following factors (Annex 6, paragraph 16 of the *Operational Guidelines*):

- (i) Conservation of natural and semi-natural systems, and of wild species of fauna and flora
- (ii) Conservation of biodiversity within farming systems;
- (iii) Sustainable land use;
- (iv) Enhancement of scenic beauty;
- (v) Ex-situ collections;
- (vi) Outstanding examples of humanity's inter-relationship with nature;
- (vii) Historically significant discoveries