ICOMOS
Netherlands

The Statement of Amsterdam

ICOMOS CONFERENCE * WATER & HERITAGE
PROTECTING DELTAS: HERITAGE HELPS !

Saving the deltas of the world is one of the most critical challenges for a sustainable future. Increasing population density and water related hazards threatens the rich and diverse heritage on the banks of rivers, in low lying deltas and in vulnerable coastal regions. Climate change affects flood and drought patterns, groundwater and sea levels, pollution and the frequency and intensity of disasters. Societies and professional communities related to water, heritage and spatial planning alike are challenged to change and adapt.
For a world struggling to find sustainable solutions, heritage helps by providing valuable examples of successful and not so successful strategies to deal with uncertainty and risk.
It allows us to better understand the dynamic relationship between societies, water management and governance. Human ingenuity and the capacity to share water management experience across cultures shaped iconic cultural landscapes and helped coping with water hazards in the past; they are key to improving wellbeing in the present; and will determine our chance of creating an equitable and sustainable future for all. Similarly, modern water management offers essential technologies to protect world heritage sites acutely threatened by natural disasters and prepare for the impacts of environmental change.
UNESCO affirms the connection between heritage, water and sustainable development through its programmes and research bodies, the conventions on World Heritage, Intangible Heritage and Underwater Heritage, and in the declarations on Responsibilities Towards Future Generations and on Culture for Sustainable Development. Its Climate Change strategy emphasizes the importance of cross-sectoral approaches.
ICOMOS Netherlands convened the conference "Protecting deltas: heritage helps!" from 23-28 September 2013 in Amsterdam, to contribute towards safe and sustainable communities in delta regions. More than 100 water, heritage and planning experts from over 20 countries answered the call to share innovative strategies on heritage protection and water management, to build and promote linkages within and between communities, and to identify opportunities to collaborate for mutual benefits.

The conference finds that:

- Water, land and societies are constantly evolving. Water heritage is dynamic by nature; its management is **'management of change'**. Many historic water structures are still in use, modern waterworks are heritage of the future. They epitomize the need to adapt the function and meaning of sites based on principles of flexibility and resilience. Profound understanding of historical continuity is an essential source of inspiration to improve planning processes. Vice-versa, understanding the social function of water infrastructure is crucial to historic research and site protection.
- Attractive, sustainable and resilient **cities and regions** fully integrate heritage management, water technology, urban and spatial planning. Heritage is a valuable asset as a source of pride and identification, social and economic development, stimulating striving communities. Safety measures preparing societies for the effects of climate change will work best where they are combined with improving cultural landscapes, and implemented with respect for heritage, local institutions and the social context.
- The societal desire for sustainability has found its expression in spatial planning, but the relation of heritage, development and sustainability is still in its infancy. There is an urgent need to create a **shared vision**, and communicate the links to policy makers, professionals and the public. Spatial planning plays a key role in involving stakeholders in participatory processes, and in connecting decision makers with experts including engineers, archaeologists, historians, geographers, ecologist and landscape architects.
- **Education and capacity development** are key to facilitate institutional transformations needed to integrate water, heritage and development. Relatively recent advances in water technology created flood protection and water supply technologies too easily taken for granted. Traditional knowledge and heritage plays a crucial role in reminding societies that we have to keep redefining our relationship with water. More research is needed to evaluate the potential of traditional approaches for scaling up to solve today's challenges.

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Recognizing the on-going and accelerating threats of water to human societies and the importance of heritage for water manage-ment, the conference calls upon governments, intergovernmental organizations, the corporate sector and civil society to ensure ade-quate and concrete actions. It recommends to:

- Promote linkages for mutual benefits between international and national NGOs, national and local governments, civil society and relevant international and national organizations and networks engaged with heritage and water management, urban development, climate change adaptation, sustainability and disaster response including UNESCO, ICOMOS, UNFCCC and UNISDR;
- Foster active research, exchange and dissemination of water and heritage related knowledge and experience, including traditional and informal knowledge, between governmental, non-governmental, private and research organizations including UNESCO, ICID, IWHA, C-40, ICOMOS, IWA and WBCSD.
- Develop education and capacity development programmes that support a broad inclusion of heritage aspects into training in water management, civil engineering, urban and spatial planning, and the integration of water aspects into heritage management education. Stimulate partnerships between organizations from the various fields to support disseminating of best practices and innovative solutions;
- Encourage the development and use of international, national, and regional strategies to protect and conserve natural and cultural heritage sites from floods, droughts and other water-related disasters. This includes risk mapping for water and heritage, sharing of relevant information between agencies, early warning systems, protective measures, risk spreading measures including insurance, adaptation measures and even evacuation plans;
- Acknowledge the importance and ensure the involvement of civil society, local governments and communities as primary owners and caretakers of tangible and intangible heritage in the development and preparation of legitimate water and heritage-related policies, strategies and plans;
- Communicate relevant information on water management as both risk to and essential part of heritage to decision makers and the wider public through collaboration with the cultural sector and use of multiple communication channels including policy briefs and new media.
- Develop integrated maps combining water and heritage information, to help raise the awareness of water experts, decision makers and the public about the heritage dimension of water management and the extent of water-related risks to societies and their natural and cultural heritage;
- Advocate the importance and value of heritage and historical experience for water and sustainable development in international and regional fora for water, heritage and development, including the WWF7, the Rotterdam delta conference 2014 and the UNESCO General Assembly;
- Advocate the importance of linking heritage to water management and urban planning in ICOMOS, including its General Assembly 2014 in Florence, to recognize the dynamic character of water related heritage, to value its tangible and intangible benefits, and to acknowledge heritage in an evolutionary, society and sustainability focused manner. Support the integration of heritage-related issues into international standards and guidelines for water management and climate change adaptation;
- Explore options to charge a team of experts under the joint supervision of UN-WATER, ICOMOS and IUCN to elaborate the relations and mutual benefits of water for heritage and heritage for water as a decisive action towards universal recognition of heritage for water and vice versa.

For more information visit www.icomosconference.nl or contact conference@icomos.nl