

**Timber Heritage Conservation and Cultural Tourism:
Values, Innovation and Visitor Management**

Great Hall, Chulalongkorn University, Bangkok, Thailand, 6-8 November 2015

Address by Sue Millar - President of ICOMOS ISC on Cultural tourism (ICTC)

Our international conference on ***Timber Heritage Conservation and Cultural Tourism: Values, Innovation and Visitor Management*** being held here at Chulalongkorn University is both important and timely and I am sorry I am unable to join you.

ICOMOS International Scientific Committee on Cultural Tourism is pleased to be consolidating our collaboration with ICOMOS Thailand begun two years ago in 2013 at Sukhothai World Heritage site with an Expert Seminar on *Living Heritage: Creative Tourism and Sustainable Communities* so ably led by ICOMOS International Cultural Tourism Committee's Vice-President, Dr Jaturong Pokhatsiri. We are also delighted to be collaborating with the International Scientific Committee on Vernacular Architecture on a formal basis following the informal cooperation on the study visit to Ifugao Rice Terraces World Heritage site, Philippines, in 2012.

Such collaborations between ICOMOS National and Scientific committees, in my view, are the only way forward as we seek to develop holistic processes to define, protect, and sustain our diverse cultural heritage in the face of a fast changing world and, in particular, bringing together the interests, synergies and complementarity of conservation and sustainable tourism. This year ICTC also held a joint seminar with ICOMOS Seychelles on the proposed World Heritage site of Mission Lodge, Sans Souci, currently on the World Heritage Tentative List.

Our world is one in which people are migrating from their original homelands either permanently or temporarily as tourists on a massive scale, one hitherto unseen.

In 2012 Taleb Rifai, Secretary-General, World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) wrote:

One billion is an extraordinary number.

Let us for a minute look back to 1950, when traveling outside of one's country was restricted to a small elite of wealthy people and a number of adventurers. When there were just 25 million international tourists discovering the world. When the majority of the people of the world would spend their entire life never going beyond a 100 km radius.

Today, just one generation later, one billion people are on the move. By the end of 2012, one seventh of the world's population will have crossed international borders in a single year. Four billion more would have been on domestic trips within their national borders.'

The number has grown exponentially each year and this incremental growth is forecast to continue.

Development demands for better infrastructure, better homes, better hotels and a competitive edge has led to a construction boom in the world's major cities and flight from the countryside to the city especially by young people. City planners are left to decide between widely differing - and in many cases completely opposite - value systems. They – and we as cultural heritage conservation professionals - are asked to resolve contradictory demands. So often the tension between retaining and enhancing a sense of place both for the benefit of the resident community and to meet the requirements of a successful cultural tourism destination is at odds with the race to build ever higher sky-scrapers, varying in shape, but in a universally recognisable style of concrete, steel and glass.

Nowhere is this dilemma highlighted more than in the field of timber heritage conservation.

We see Mr M R Kukrit Pramoj's *Heritage Home*, Bangkok surrounded by new apartment blocks and high rise buildings



ICOMOS International Cultural Tourism Charter 1999 has led the way in seeking a balanced approach to these challenges:

“Domestic and international tourism continues to be among the foremost vehicles for cultural exchange, providing a personal experience, not only of that which has survived from the past, but of the contemporary life and society of others.”

In the framework of the recently agreed UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 2030 we are forced to ask ‘Have we got the balance right?’ What are the best strategies for cultural heritage conservation and sustainable tourism development? What is the impact of the internationally agreed shift in emphasis and greater acceptance that ‘small is beautiful’ in economic and social development, encouraging individual initiative and community entrepreneurship with the goal of "Developing and implementing tools to monitor sustainable development impacts for sustainable tourism which creates jobs, promotes local culture and products". (Target 12.b)

This target for sustainable tourism places timber heritage centre stage both in the cities and in the countryside. Historic villages, houses, temples, sculptures and souvenirs inspired by this heritage are the bedrock of national and community identities, motivation for experiential cultural tourism and incentive for the development of new encounters and innovative cultural products.

Sustainable sources of wood for timber conservation, training in traditional craft skills, a greater awareness in visitor management strategies of the fragility some timber structures, making meaningful for visitors to the iconic temples of the Asia-Pacific region the signs – DO NOT TOUCH – through improved interpretation practices as well as discussions amongst ourselves about the implications of revised Nara Declaration are important not only in the context cultural heritage protection and conservation but also in the wider context cultural tourism development and poverty alleviation. Such challenges as these - and others - I know will be covered at some point during the formal and informal proceedings of this conference.

I wish you well and look forward to reading the published report.