

Activity Report

Working Group UNESCO World Heritage

In 2006 the IX Alpine Conference established a working group aimed inter alia at facilitating transboundary and serial applications to the UNESCO World Heritage List from the Alpine arc. In 2009 the X Alpine Conference requested the Working Group to cluster potential alpine sites according to the themes that emerged from its analysis. The working group has successfully concluded its work during its eight years of mandate. Starting from the precise question on how to best harmonize UNESCO World Heritage Tentative Lists in the Alpine region, the Working Group developed an agreed methodology, based on a scientific approach, aimed at harmonize proposals lists coming from the Alpine arc.

This development of the mandate was the result of gaining knowledge and achieving process when the work went along. The working group has achieved the tasks given by its mandates, especially

- Elaboration and analysis on the status of World Heritage in the Alpine Region
- Facilitation of harmonization of Tentative List screening of potential natural sites (Workshops held in Bern and in Valdieri) and facilitation of upstream processes
- Development and implementation of a methodology to identify potentially suitable WH in the Alpine region
- Discussion about tangible and intangible values of heritage in the Alps
- Establishment of contacts with UNESCO World Heritage Centre¹ who defined the results achieved as a best practice, presentation of results for other region.

Organization/Form of work

The participation of designated members in the WG remained very stable (with some exceptions) and included mainly UNESCO World Heritage experts from the States Parties: the continuity of attendance through years of the designated members is one of the reason of success. The working group met generally twice a year in various locations, generally in Italy (including France and Slovenia) and often allowed for on-site experience of World Heritage properties. The working group was supported by the Permanent Secretariat of the Alpine Convention and effectively chaired by Italy. It is to be underlined that the results provided by the WG were very cost efficient² and that the thematic workshops organized throughout the years were sponsored by external funds³.

¹ <http://whc.unesco.org/en/news/584>

² Starting from the third year it was decided to work only in English. Every meeting was hosted by a local administration and the experts were travelling at their own expenses (or reimbursed by their public administration).

³ Contribution from Switzerland for the Workshop held in Bern (14-15/12/2010), from Austria for the workshop held in Trieste (2-3/02/2011), from Principality of Monaco for the Workshop held in Valdieri, from the Italian Presidency of the Alpine Convention 2013/2014 and Chamber of Commerce of Verona for the workshop held in Verona (27/05/2014), from the Italian Presidency of the Alpine Convention 2013/2014 and the Autonomous Region of Friuli Venezia Giulia for the workshop held in Gorizia (05/12/2014), from the Italian Presidency of the Alpine Convention 2013/2014, Fondazione Dolomiti UNESCO and Longarone Fiere for the workshop held in Longarone (27/09/2014)

The work included the development of joint analysis and overviews (*“Alpine sites and the UNESCO World Heritage – Background study”*; *“Protected sites in the Alps with a cultural or natural designation”*; *“Properties in the Alps inscribed in the UNESCO World Heritage List”*) and was characterized by comprehensive individual contributions of WG members and very open discussions in the WG meetings. The working methodology has shown to be successful as the work could be based on thorough analysis and the joint input from the Member States, which allowed the best content/input.

The work of the WG was supported by several scientific workshops which included a broad range of international experts and feed back with the working group. Among them, particular relevance has been covered by the international expert meeting “Natural world heritage in the Alpine region” (Bern, 14th-15th December 2010) and the expert workshop on potential cultural world heritage in the Alps (Trieste, 2nd-3rd February 2011) (financed by extra budgetary funds: Switzerland, Austria and Principality of Monaco). Further workshops during the Italian Presidency of the Alpine Convention for the two-year period 2013-2014⁴ have been organized with local and regional administrations.

Follow up:

In this view, it is recommended to better communicate the work of the WG to relevant stakeholders (e.g. World Heritage Centre, UNESCO, IUCN, ICOMOS, ICCROM and national UNESCO commissions, other regional fora etc.) and to maintain a virtual web platform on the Alpine Convention’s website, with the aim to regularly update information on WH, Geoparks and other similar on-going or future nominations, with the support of the Permanent Secretariat of the Alpine Convention. Moreover, it is suggested to “physically” present the outcomes in relevant meetings (national UNESCO Commissions, World Heritage Committee, local nominations events etc.). In the frame of the Alpine Convention, it is recommended the following:

- to implement the results and outcomes achieved by the WG, concerning potentially suitable nominations from the Alps;
- to provide scientific support to the tentative nomination of the “Alps of the Sea”;
- to communicate the methodology and the results of the work of the WG to relevant stakeholders (national audience, UNESCO, WH Convention stakeholders, other regional conventions/fora);
- to transfer the results to other relevant Working Groups or Platforms (e.g. Platform on Ecological networks etc.) and especially to the newly established Working Group on Sustainable Tourism (in which the participation of experts on World Heritage of the delegations is recommended);
- to assure also a link with the “World Heritage and Sustainable tourism Programme”.

The following recommendations for future WGs / similar work on UNESCO World Heritage in other regions of the world can be drawn and summarized:

⁴ Verona (27th May 2013), “The natural and cultural alpine capital as UNESCO World Heritage”; Gorizia (5th December 2013), “The natural and cultural value of karst landscapes: focus on Classic Karst”; Longarone (27th September 2014, “Il Paesaggio e il brand UNESCO: un binomio alpino e non solo”).

- be based on official governance systems (e.g. Alpine Convention)
- ensure stable, continuous attendance at the WG (small stable group, enlarged with external experts when needed)
- contacts with policy makers
- ensure sufficient WH expertise
- include both scientific and NGO expertise
- use scientific analysis as base for the work
- ensure adequate dissemination of results