

The Norwich Accord

Finding the Spirit of Place Conservation, Communities & Cultural Tourism

The Norwich Accord is a declaration articulating the relationship between conservation, communities and cultural tourism based on research and evidence gathered over a three year period by ICOMOS-UK Cultural Tourism Committee, especially taking account of the presentations and discussions at York, Norwich and Canterbury.

The theme of the ICOMOS 2008 General Assembly in Québec, Canada *Finding the Spirit of Place* was the catalyst for debate on the role of communities and visitors – and in particular cultural tourists - in conservation decisions and conservation management.

Context

ICOMOS-UK Cultural Tourism Committee sought to explore links between the tangible and intangible heritage in terms of the association of people to the spaces and places they experience as visitors. Cultural expression* and the part played by community participation in creating meaning and memories for cultural tourists was examined. A comparison of the experience of three English medieval cathedral cities played a central role in the empirical research.

York Spaces seminar focussed on the development of the 'spirit of spaces' in historic places with visits to the Minster, surrounding streets and city walls. It addressed the ways in which visitors to heritage tourism attractions utilize internal and external space, at different levels of scale and from different perspectives.

*Norwich HEART** – People & Places* examined the management implications of 'realising the reality' of placing people centre stage. What happens when a wide spectrum of people – heritage experts, local communities and visitors – often with conflicting interests – are involved directly in decisions concerning heritage conservation? What happens when individuals and groups take an active role in shaping the 'heritage of place'? A guided walk enabled participants to address these issues and others in the context of the regeneration of the riverside – the medieval port - and living tradition of the market.

The symposium on *Finding the Spirit of Place - Cultural Tourism & Conservation Challenges in the 21st century* was held at the Canterbury World Heritage Site in conjunction with the 2007 Workshop and Annual Meeting of the ICOMOS International Scientific Committee on Cultural Tourism (ISCCT). Case studies from the UK - Liverpool, Canterbury and Tyntesfield; and internationally - China, Philippines, Jordan, and Australia - revealed how conservation and management decisions have changed people's appreciation of places – both positively and negatively – sometimes by accident, sometimes by design.

At Canterbury a contentious issue was examined. Whether cultural tourism and cultural tourists are sustaining or destroying the spirit of place and therefore the very essence of conservation. The idea of a statement encapsulating our thinking and our considered response to this series of investigations first gained momentum as the Canterbury Declaration.

At Norwich where the final seminar was held there was common agreement that a statement of conservation principles in the context of *Finding the Spirit of Place* would make a valuable contribution to the wider debate on the cultural heritage conservation movement and responsible tourism; and the next revision of the ICOMOS International Cultural Tourism Charter.

*Cultural expressions are defined by UNESCO as 'those expressions that result from the creativity of individuals, groups and societies, and that have cultural content that refer to the symbolic meaning, artistic dimension and cultural values originating from or expressing cultural identities.' *Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions, October 2005*

** *Norwich HEART* is the Norwich Heritage Economic and Regeneration Trust and the principal sponsor of the seminar.

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Statement of Purpose

The Norwich Accord offers a

- coherent statement of the 21st century cultural heritage conservation movement in the context of communities and cultural tourism
- justification for cultural value(s) as one of the principal drivers for conservation and tourism destination management resulting in important recognisable community benefits
- consideration of cultural tourism as a key contributor in capturing, sustaining, enhancing and presenting the Spirit of Place

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1. *The Concept of Spirit of Place is central to the rationale for the protection of the historic environment in the 21st century.* The concept of *Spirit of Place* recognises conservation as a dynamic process involving an on-going interaction between the tangible and intangible heritage: it is concerned with subjective relationships and the different identities of people with places.
2. *'Significance' or 'Spirit of Place' within the Historic Environment* is not an objective quality, or one accepted primarily as being inherent in a place, but reflects fundamental relationships between people and places. The Spirit of Place is the outcome of human inspiration, creativity, endeavour, and validates on-going interventions to preserve specific architecture, archaeology, cultural landscapes and historic urban environments with their associated memories, stories and traditions.
3. *Conservation Management Plans (CMPs)* provide the opportunity through which the values of a place can be captured, the pressures for change can be managed, and policy recommendations made that will enhance the Spirit of Place. They include mention of individual experts and community groups who might contribute to the conservation management process, but rarely involve visitors in the consultations.

4. *Cultural Heritage & Tourism Professionals and Decision Makers* play a critical role in mediating between different interests and opinions. Only through a thorough understanding of key relationships is it possible to ensure that actions to rehabilitate the physical fabric and manage public access will enhance rather than diminish the Spirit of Place.
5. *Community Engagement* is essential to achieve positive outcomes for the conservation process. Public engagement with cultural heritage places and traditions, and the aspirations of diverse groups of community stakeholders informs good decision making.
6. *Communities and Visitors (cultural tourists)* are active players alongside cultural heritage professionals in the continuous process of finding, defining and re-defining the Spirit of Place both where they live and where in the world they are visitors.
7. *Shared Responsibility* on the part of the host community and the visitor brings with it a duty of respect. This requires reasonable and well managed access to and participation in cultural development and cultural heritage as well as an understanding of different cultural values.
8. *Cultural Exchange* provides personal experience of that which has survived from the past as well as the contemporary life and society of others. Interpretation and presentation, especially when it is community-based, plays an important role in creating opportunities to make the cultural heritage accessible to diverse audiences. Cultural Tourism is one of the foremost vehicles of cultural exchange.
9. *Cultural Tourism* management is a central part of destination management. Visitors – local, national and international - are important reasons for and instigators of conservation projects and generators of economic development. This economic reality, managed sensitively, serves to enhance the spirit of place. However, threats to the spirit of a place caused by overwhelming numbers of visitors at iconic cultural heritage sites are a world-wide challenge for cultural heritage management.

S. Millar, Chair ICOMOS-UK Cultural Tourism Committee May 2009