

# The Seoul Declaration on Tourism in Asia's Historic Towns and Areas

## 1. PREAMBLE

Meeting in Seoul, Korea, from the 30<sup>th</sup> of May to the 1st of June 2005, to take part in the 2005 ICOMOS Regional Conference in Seoul: Managing Tourism in Historic Towns and Areas in Asia,

Drawing on the experience and context of many historic towns and areas in Asia particularly those inscribed on the World Heritage List, the meeting reflected upon Recommendation 3 of the Hoi An Declaration of 2003 on the Conservation of Historic Districts in Asia: ***Integrating Tourism Development and Preservation of Cultural Heritage***, which states that:

*“The preservation of cultural heritage and tourism development are not fundamentally opposed and should be seen as activities that can be mutually supporting. Particularly in Asia, tourism is a fast growing economic activity that can provide a strong motivation for the preservation of historic districts. It also gives very important opportunities for people from different cultures to meet and understand and better respect the history, culture and arts of an area. Yet, as mentioned in the Cultural Tourism Charter adopted by ICOMOS in 1999, such economic activity has to be adequately managed, to avoid damage of cultural heritage sites that remain fragile in their material and intangible dimensions, and their surroundings. Tourism sector representatives must work with conservation authorities to establish ways to achieve sustainable tourism development without exhausting non-renewable cultural resources such as heritage”.*

Noting that historic towns and areas *constitute a major part of the living cultural heritage of Asian countries. These are often the expression of a rich and fruitful history of cultural exchange between the regions of Asia and their various peoples over centuries.* Their fabric and intangible values are non-renewable assets, nor able to be replicated, and must be identified and respected to ensure cultural sustainability, which in turn supports tourism sustainability.

Considering that “cultural heritage” is a complete socio-cultural composition ranging from sites recognized as being of World Heritage significance to heritage sites that give local identity in towns and areas throughout Asia,

Recognising the broad diversity of heritage assets in relation to tourism (immovable evidence, archaeological resources, buildings, sites, cultural landscapes, art objects, sculpture, equipment and installations such as films, books, archives and museum objects and non material heritage like music, song and dance, customs, knowledge, rituals, living heritage such as living human-made heritage, parks settings of historic buildings, traditional food and drink, etc.).

Recognising the useful context provided by the World Heritage Convention as an instrument to support international cooperation and improve consideration of the entire heritage of Asian countries rather than only the few sites already inscribed on the World Heritage List.

Noting also the importance of accurate and authentic interpretation and presentation of heritage places for tourism, and the relevance of the current development principles and guidelines with its partners such as the Enane Centre, Belgium on a charter for the Interpretation of Cultural Heritage Places,

Sincerely thanking the Korean authorities, ICOMOS-Korea and all the organizers for their efforts in providing an opportunity for the fruitful sharing of knowledge and exchange amongst specialists, managers and researchers from China, India, Indonesia, Iraq, Japan, Korea, Mongolia, the Philippines, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Vietnam as well as Australia, Canada and other countries and representatives of international organizations,

Participants of the regional ICOMOS meeting in Seoul adopt the following Declaration of principles and recommendations, addressing them to national and local authorities; as well as to the ICOMOS General Assembly in Xi'an in October 2005.

## **2. ISSUES**

Experiences such as those presented at the conference provide useful lessons and examples that should be shared amongst tourism operators, authorities and professionals of the various disciplines involved in the management of historic towns and districts in Asia. Issues to be considered include:

### **2.1. Establishing a balance between tourism and conservation**

The impacts and benefits of tourism are being felt increasingly on the fabric and identity of many historic towns and areas of Asia, through gentrification and replacement of community functions with tourism services. These benefits and impacts are particularly felt with World Heritage Sites where greater incentive for adequate management and conservation is given, as well as greater tourism interests and pressures. It is felt that it is important to disseminate widely and adapt as regionally relevant cultural tourism management guidelines such as the ICOMOS Cultural Tourism Charter to assist communities, governments and tourist operators when working in heritage places.

### **2.2. Responding to the emergence of experiential tourism**

The conference noted the emergence of ecotourism and experiential tourism, more focused on the tourist's experience than mass tourism. Experiential tourism leaves the tourist physically invigorated, mentally rejuvenated, culturally enriched and spiritually elevated. It is particularly relevant to ensure the introduction of respectful and authentic cultural tourism to heritage sites.

### **2.3. Integrating interpretation in on-going conservation and tourism planning**

Interpretation and presentation of the meaning of historic towns and areas as well as other types of heritage places is an integral part of the conservation process and fundamental to positive conservation outcomes, and hence needs to be incorporated into the planning, financing, and management of every tourism development project.

### **2.4. Maintaining authenticity of historic towns and areas**

The need to maintain the authenticity of heritage places within the context of changing development is central to conservation and is particularly relevant to places of vernacular heritage, which constitute a major expression of the cultural diversity and influences of Asian towns and areas. Often imbued with intangible values, and still largely unrecognized as "heritage", they are vulnerable to subtle changes such as gentrification and dramatic

changes such as replacement of traditional activities with tourism infrastructure. They need to be recognized and respected as much as the monuments and sites. Tourism initiatives should respect and safeguard the place, cultural practices and the dignity of local residents and associated communities.

## **2.5. Monitoring the impacts of tourism**

Each historic town and area has a carrying capacity for tourism which needs to be assessed and used as monitoring mechanism. The impacts of tourism on heritage places can be sudden or cumulative, subtle and fatal. It is essential to monitor the impacts of tourism on places and communities from the preplanning stage to the ongoing implementation and management of any tourism project. Such monitoring should not be limited to those quantifiable factors alone and should also address more qualitative issues such as the meaning, character or life of historic towns and areas.

## **3. STRATEGIES AND APPROACH**

### **3.1. Involving communities**

The communities of historic towns and areas should be recognized as key stakeholders and participants in effective tourism management, from the initial decision to interpret and promote a place, through the planning, development, implementation and review phases of any tourism project.

Raising community awareness, the provision of accessible information, meaningful consultation and effective participation all help the community to understand, share and care for the heritage values of the historic town or area, in relation to tourism interests. It must be noted that the necessary conservation measures may include restrictions on tourism initiatives where heritage values are threatened.

Cultural tourism activities should aim to provide equitable economic, social, and cultural benefits to the host community at all levels, through education, training, human resource development and the creation of economic opportunities. To that end, the training and employment of tourism workers and site interpreters from the host community should be encouraged.

### **3.2. Engaging with a multiplicity of stakeholders to develop and implement conservation and tourism management plans**

Whilst host communities are most affected by tourism development, they are part of a chain of stakeholders each with a right and a responsibility to appreciate and conserve heritage places. Stakeholders include governments, entrepreneurs/tourism operators, NGOs such as ICOMOS, professionals, academics and students, host communities, future generations and of course, tourists themselves. A structured approach to consultation and planning is essential when dealing with such diverse interests. Consideration of these issues should be included in the development of a Tourism Management Plan for heritage towns and areas where tourism is an emerging issue.

### **3.3. Including settings of monuments and sites in conservation and tourism management plans**

Tourism planning for an historic town or area should include special consideration about any impact on the setting and surroundings of the heritage places of tourism activities and particularly of its associated infrastructure to prevent damage or loss of cultural heritage values and places. The surrounding landscape, natural environment and the overall

cultural and geographical settings are all integral parts of a site's significance, and, as such, should be taken into account in its management.

### **3.4. Ensuring sustainability in tourism management**

Social, economic and environmental sustainability in the long term must be among the central goals of tourism projects. The potential effects of tourism infrastructure and visitor numbers on the cultural value, physical characteristics, integrity, and natural environment of the site and the community must be fully considered in Heritage Impact Assessment studies.

### **3.5. Sharing experiences to improve practice**

It is important to establish an ongoing exchange network and dialogue between conservation interests and tourism. The regional ICOMOS network is one such opportunity.

## **4. CONCLUSIONS**

In conclusion, participants in the 2005 ICOMOS Regional Conference in Seoul, wish to reaffirm the value of such regional meetings in developing better conservation practice and professional networks in Asia.

They call for the wide dissemination and discussion of the Seoul Declaration so that the issues, strategies and approaches it expresses can contribute to the improvement of the management of tourism in towns and areas of Asia and to the development of an ongoing dialogue between conservation and tourism interests. We recommend National and International Committees of ICOMOS follow up on the declaration's dissemination and impact.

They call for the declaration to be presented to the ICOMOS General Assembly in Xi'an, China in October 2005 so that its recommendations can be shared with the wider network of ICOMOS committees and partners, and that it can help encourage cooperation between National and International Committees on this universal subject of tourism and historic towns and areas.

Adopted in Seoul, Korea, 31 May, 2005