



# QUÉBEC DECLARATION

## ON THE PRESERVATION OF THE SPIRIT OF PLACE

*Adopted at Québec, Canada, October 4<sup>th</sup> 2008*

### Preamble

Meeting in the historic city of Québec (Canada), from 29 September to 4 October 2008, at the invitation of ICOMOS Canada, on the occasion of the 16th General Assembly of ICOMOS and the celebrations marking the 400th anniversary of the founding of Québec, the participants adopt the following Declaration of principles and recommendations to preserve the spirit of place through the safeguarding of tangible and intangible heritage, which is regarded as an innovative and efficient manner of ensuring sustainable and social development throughout the world.

This Declaration is part of a series of measures and actions undertaken by ICOMOS over the course of the past five years to safeguard and promote the spirit of places, namely their living, social and spiritual nature. In 2003, ICOMOS focused the scientific symposium of its 14th General Assembly on the theme of the preservation of social intangible values of monuments and sites. In the ensuing Kimberly Declaration, ICOMOS committed itself to taking into account the intangible values (memory, beliefs, traditional knowledge, attachment to place) and the local communities that are the custodians of these values in the management and preservation of monuments and sites under the World Heritage Convention of 1972. The ICOMOS Xi'an Declaration of 2005 draws attention to the conservation of context, defined as the physical, visual and natural aspects as well as social and spiritual practices, customs, traditional knowledge and other intangible forms and expressions, in the protection and promotion of world heritage monuments and sites. It also calls upon a multidisciplinary approach and diversified sources of information in order to better understand, manage and conserve context. The Declaration of Foz Do Iguaçu, drawn up in 2008 by ICOMOS Americas, specifies that the tangible and intangible components of heritage are essential in the preservation of the identity of communities that have created and transmitted spaces of cultural and historical



significance. The new ICOMOS charters on Cultural Routes and on Interpretation and Presentation, formulated after extensive consultations and presented for ratification at the present 16th ICOMOS General Assembly, also recognize the importance of intangible dimensions of heritage and the spiritual value of place. Because of the indivisible nature of tangible and intangible heritage and the meanings, values and context intangible heritage gives to objects and places, ICOMOS is currently considering the adoption of a new charter dedicated specifically to the intangible heritage of monuments and sites. In this regard, we encourage discussion and debates in order to develop a new conceptual vocabulary that takes into account the ontological changes of the spirit of place.

The 16th General Assembly, and more specifically the Youth Forum, the Aboriginal Forum and the Scientific Symposium, have provided an opportunity to further explore the relationship between tangible and intangible heritage, and the internal social and cultural mechanisms of the spirit of place. Spirit of place is defined as the tangible (buildings, sites, landscapes, routes, objects) and the intangible elements (memories, narratives, written documents, rituals, festivals, traditional knowledge, values, textures, colors, odors, etc.), that is to say the physical and the spiritual elements that give meaning, value, emotion and mystery to place. Rather than separate spirit from place, the intangible from the tangible, and consider them as opposed to each other, we have investigated the many ways in which the two interact and mutually construct one another. The spirit of place is constructed by various social actors, its architects and managers as well as its users, who all contribute actively and concurrently to giving it meaning. Considered as a relational concept, spirit of place takes on a plural and dynamic character, capable of possessing multiple meanings and singularities, of changing through time, and of belonging to different groups. This more dynamic approach is also better adapted to today's globalized world, which is characterized by transnational population movements, relocated populations, increased intercultural contacts, pluralistic societies, and multiple attachments to place.

The spirit of place offers a more comprehensive understanding of the living and, at the same time, permanent character of monuments, sites and cultural landscapes. It provides a richer, more dynamic, and inclusive vision of cultural heritage. Spirit of place exists, in one form or another, in practically all the cultures of the world, and is constructed by human beings in response to their social needs. The communities that inhabit place, especially when they are traditional societies, should be intimately associated in the safeguarding of its memory, vitality, continuity and spirituality.

The participants of the 16th General Assembly of ICOMOS therefore address the following Declaration of principles and recommendations to intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations, national and local authorities and all institutions and specialists in a position to contribute through legislation, policies, planning processes and management to better protecting and promoting the spirit of place.



## Rethinking the Spirit of Place

- 1.** Recognizing that the spirit of place is made up of tangible (sites, buildings, landscapes, routes, objects) as well as intangible elements (memories, narratives, written documents, festivals, commemorations, rituals, traditional knowledge, values, textures, colors, odors, etc.), which all significantly contribute to making place and to giving it spirit, we declare that intangible cultural heritage gives a richer and more complete meaning to heritage as a whole and it must be taken into account in all legislation concerning cultural heritage, and in all conservation and restoration projects for monuments, sites, landscapes, routes and collections of objects.
- 2.** Because the spirit of place is complex and multiform, we demand that governments and other stakeholders call upon the expertise of multidisciplinary research teams and traditional practitioners in order to better understand, preserve and transmit the spirit of place.
- 3.** Since the spirit of place is a continuously reconstructed process, which responds to the needs for change and continuity of communities, we uphold that it can vary in time and from one culture to another according to their practices of memory, and that a place can have several spirits and be shared by different groups.

## Identifying the Threats to the Spirit of Place

- 4.** Since climatic change, mass tourism, armed conflict and urban development lead to the transformation and disruption of societies, we need to better understand these threats in order to establish preventive measures and sustainable solutions. We recommend that governmental and non-governmental agencies, and local and national heritage organizations develop long term strategic plans to prevent the degradation of the spirit of place and its environment. The inhabitants and local authorities should also be made aware of the safeguarding of the spirit of place so that they are better prepared to deal with the threats of a changing world.
- 5.** As the sharing of places invested with different spirits by several groups increases the risk of competition and conflict, we recognize that these sites require specific management plans and strategies, adapted to the pluralistic context of modern multicultural societies. Because the threats to the spirit of place are especially high amongst minority groups, be they natives or newcomers, we recommend that these groups benefit first and foremost from specific policies and practices.



## Safeguarding the Spirit of Place

**6.** Because in most countries of the world today the spirit of place, in particular its intangible components, do not currently benefit from formal educational programs or legal protection, we recommend the setting up of forums and consultations with experts from different backgrounds and resource persons from local communities, and the development of training programs and legal policies in order to better safeguard and promote the spirit of place.

**7.** Considering that modern digital technologies (digital databases, websites) can be used efficiently and effectively at a low cost to develop multimedia inventories that integrate tangible and intangible elements of heritage, we strongly recommend their widespread use in order to better preserve, disseminate and promote heritage places and their spirit. These technologies facilitate the diversity and constant renewal of the documentation on the spirit of place.

## Transmitting the Spirit of Place

**8.** Recognizing that spirit of place is transmitted essentially by people, and that transmission is an important part of its conservation, we declare that it is through interactive communication and the participation of the concerned communities that the spirit of place is most efficiently safeguarded, used and enhanced. Communication is the best tool for keeping the spirit of place alive.

**9.** Given that local communities are generally in the best position to comprehend the spirit of place, especially in the case of traditional cultural groups, we maintain that they are also best equipped to safeguard it and should be intimately associated in all endeavors to preserve and transmit the spirit of place. Non-formal (narratives, rituals, performances, traditional experience and practices, etc.) and formal (educational programs, digital databases, websites, pedagogical tools, multimedia presentations, etc.) means of transmission should be encouraged because they ensure not only the safeguarding of the spirit of place but, more importantly, the sustainable and social development of the community.

**10.** Recognizing that intergenerational and transcultural transmission plays an important role in the sustained dissemination and the preservation of the spirit of place, we recommend the association and involvement of younger generations, as well as different cultural groups associated with the site, in policy-making and the management of the spirit of place.

