

Museums, Friends and Sustainable Cultural Tourism\*

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Julia Oh

I have been asked to give an overview of the actions that the World Federation of Friends of Museums has been taking on this issue, so I thought it best to outline the problem and then talk about how the WFFM became involved, and what future steps are proposed.

As a background and some indication of the scale of tourism, the Pacific Asia Tourist Authority's figures for 33 countries within the Asian Pacific region in the first six months of 2006 show that the region has already received just under 86 million visitors, and according to the World Tourism Organisation, by the year 2010 an estimated one billion tourists will be travelling the world.

Although many come to shop, and enjoy beachside resorts, a significant proportion of visitors come as cultural tourists, defined by the International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS) Charter of Cultural Tourism in 1976 as "those wanting to be acquainted with monuments and historic-artistic sites." People travel to experience places, artefacts and activities that represent the stories and people of the past and present.

However, in their aims, cultural tourists, like other tourists, do not exist in a vacuum - their presence and their interests impact on the cultural, historic and natural resources of the country visited. Cultural tourism is undoubtedly growing, and many have pointed out that while there can be economic benefits of cultural tourism there are many negative impacts including the increased 'wear' on old and fragile sites, souvenir hunting and looting. - it can be 'a goose that not only lays a golden egg, but also messes up its own nest.' We can all cite examples: Machu Picchu, Byron's graffiti at the Chateau de Chillon in Switzerland, and we have just heard Chinese Ambassador Fu's warning in her speech that the Patola in Tibet may be closed to the public next year to prevent damage from tourism.

Calls for responsible and sustainable tourist development are not new, and charters for sustainable tourism have been published by eminent world bodies. In 2002 the United Nations General Assembly, based on the recommendations of the Johannesburg World Summit for Sustainable Development, declared 2005-2014 a world decade for "Education for Sustainable Development."

UNESCO, ICOMOS, the World Tourism Organisation and ICOM have all crafted charters for sustainable cultural tourism. These documents are important but appear almost exclusively to focus on the host country and its institutions, in a sense highlighting what needs to be done and taking a defensive stand to protect historical and cultural assets.

But who addresses the tourists themselves? Who tries to make them part of the process? Too often the codes and strategies appear as a series of top-down statements - and treat the tourist visitor as a passive agent - indeed they make no attempt to engage the visitor. That is not to say that there are no codes of conduct for visitors: a trawl through the web shows that these range from the more formal Canadian Tourism Authority and PATA codes to the informative website of Tourist Concerns, and a handful of eco-friendly travel agents, but the material is thin on the ground compared with the attention addressed to host countries and communities. Many of the recommendations have a bias towards preserving the natural environment rather than ensuring that the historical and cultural heritage will still be there for future generations.

In January 2005, in New Delhi, the Asian Development Bank and UNESCO convened a roundtable, Sustainable Development of Cultural Heritage and Cultural Tourism in South Asia. The meeting reiterated a call heard many times before that partnerships are needed at all levels to effectively promote sustainable cultural tourism.

It is this call for partnerships which provides the starting point for the involvement of the World Federation of Friends of Museums. WFFM is a partner organisation with ICOM, the International Committee of Museums. WFFM's representatives attend their executive committee meetings and

congresses, and their President Alissandra Cummins spoke at the WFFM's triennial conference in Seville, Spain, in October 2005.

The WFFM is constantly looking for ways that the two organisations can work together. As a result, in June 2005 a sub-committee was set up by WFFM to explore a joint initiative with ICOM, its members were WFFM Past President Carol Serventy, Rosemary Marsh from the British Association of Friends of Museums, Ellen Julia from France, and myself. Although I have recently stepped down from the committee, I am delighted to have been able to come to Sydney to introduce the subject to you and to convey your comments to Carla Bossi Comelli.

In December 2005 WFFM made a proposal to ICOM at their Executive Meeting in Vienna for joint action on sustainable cultural tourism. ICOM President Alissandra Cummins welcomed the joint initiative and members of the ICOM Executive Committee volunteered to join the committee. ICOM Executive Board member and Director of the Berlin Museum Dr Hans Martin Hinz accepted the chair of the joint committee and ICOM has allocated time on the agenda of the ICOM General Conference in Vienna in August 2007 for a joint workshop and discussion of the topic.

The issue of cultural tourism is not a new one for ICOM; indeed, in 2002 ICOM prepared a draft statement on cultural tourism calling for action to be taken. In January 2006 ICOM co-sponsored a conference on Sustainable Development in Vietnam, at which Dr Hinz was a keynote speaker on the topic of the contribution of museums to sustainable cultural tourism.

WFFM's members on the sub-committee have identified the damaging impact of the increased numbers of cultural tourists on heritage sites, and have suggested drawing up a simple code of behaviour for cultural tourists. Examples of similar codes have been collected, such as the UK's Countryside Code and several examples from the World Wide Web. The topic was discussed at the WFFM European meeting in Oslo in February, and several suggestions from members have been incorporated into the discussion paper which is now with Dr Hinz. It will also be discussed at the European regional meeting to be held in Belgium later this month.

WFFM's initial proposal to ICOM in December called for action to raise public awareness of the impact of cultural tourism and considered the creation of a code of conduct. However Dr Hinz has suggested that the thrust of the initiative should be towards sustainable cultural tourism, and since then he has been exploring ways that museum professionals could be made more aware of the issue. He has highlighted the educational role of museums and is now considering ways that this might be used to disseminate the message that the public as cultural tourists also have a role to play in ensuring sustainable cultural heritage.

Museums and Friends of Museums represented by ICOM and WFFM already work in partnership, and as Edmund Capon, Director of the New South Wales Art Gallery, has emphasised, the Friends especially reach out into the museum-going public. Working together we can jointly maximise the spread of a clear message to raise the awareness of the impact of cultural tourism and what needs to change for tourism to be fair to everybody - now and for future generations. This aim would be far more effective than trying to ban access to sites altogether.

At this point I would like to list some of the suggestions that have been made so far, and would invite further suggestions from Friends in the region which can be fed back to the committee

Suggestions that have made so far include:

1- The drawing up of a booklet which details the existing declarations and then gives practical examples of how museum staff and their Friends have worked together to achieve various outcomes, as examples for other groups to adapt to their own circumstances. WFFM President Carla Bossi Comelli has proposed a practical list of principles, (definitions, rights, duties and expectations) for museums-goers and museums-staff using the WFFM Code of Ethics as one source of basic principles.

2- Find a 'motto' - suggestions include "Museums, Tourism and Friends"; "Enjoy not destroy"; "Code of Respect".

3 - Design a long term communication campaign - for both ICOM and friends communities. Publications could include ICOM news, ICOM-L, Museum Magazine, WFFM newsletter. Encourage the discussion of the topic by National ICOM Committees, National Associations of Friends and local groups of Friends. Articles can be placed in internationally read magazines such as National Geographic, The Art Newspaper, relevant web-sites.

4 - Discussion of the matter at academic level, in museums and universities - especially those which have museum training courses

5- Linking up with other organizations that care for the same subject - such as ICOMOS

6- A joint WFFM ICOM session during the ICOM General Conference in Vienna in August 2007 has already been allocated on the agenda.

7 - Adoption of “Museums and Cultural Tourism - a friendly approach” as the subject for the International Museums Day in 2008

8 - Using the international networks of the WFFM and ICOM, to promote an international contest for children on sustainable cultural tourism.

There is no doubt that the issue of sustainable cultural tourism is a priority, currently the challenge is to highlight common concerns and then prioritise what kind of action will be most effective.

*Please contact WFFM President Carla Bossi Comelli with your comments and suggestions at [carlabossi@compuserve.com.mx](mailto:carlabossi@compuserve.com.mx)*

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