

Annual report of the C.C4 Working Group "Astronomical heritage in danger"

Annual report for the period January to November 2016

The commission WG of the IAU currently comprises:

Chair: Alejandro López (Argentina, IAU member)

Members:

Juan Antonio Belmonte (Spain, IAU member)

Thomas Hockey (USA, IAU member)

Javier Mejuto (Spain)

Sixto Giménez Benítez (Argentina)

The working group was formed at the beginning of 2016. The objective of the WG is to make a list of sites with relevant astronomical value for Humanity that are currently at risk. The purpose of this list is to influence governments, nongovernmental organizations, international agencies, local authorities and decision-makers to achieve protection and care of these sites.

During the current year we studied the ICOMOS' criteria for the elaboration of their list of World Heritage Sites at risk. We have seen that the idea of the list proposed by the Working Group has been different, since ICOMOS seeks to point out sites that have been declared by UNESCO as a World Heritage site and are at risk. This declaration implies that UNESCO checks in a previous instance the commitment of the local authorities with the preservation of the sites that are now at risk.

The list in preparation by the WG includes all the relevant sites for the IAU experts, regardless if they are included or not in the UNESCO's list. In fact, the list is especially relevant in the case of sites that are not considered Humanity Heritage of UNESCO, since they are the most threatened. Another contrasting point is connected with the fact that many sites are part of living traditions and therefore change over time since they are in use. That is why it is necessary to develop conceptions of "heritage" that dialogue flexibly with local ideas and practices. Beyond that, it is sought that the list contains basic information about the sites that dialogue with the one that the UNESCO requires for the presentation of applications to the World Heritage list.

The preliminary structure that has been designed to request such information is a provisional characterization that, in about 400 words, accounts for the following information:

- Name of the site:
- Country:
- Short description (including cultures involved, age, contemporary usage, etc.)
- Astronomical Relevance:
- Is it declared a World Heritage Site?:
- Situation of risk (main threats):

- Suggested actions to avoid risk:

The process of bringing together this initial list has begun. At the moment there is information being processed from sites in Argentina, Brazil, Mexico, Libya, Lebanon, Iraq, Egypt, Syria, Turkey and Jordan.

The International academic community of Cultural Astronomy has been invited to contribute to the list with potential sites. We have done this through the three big professional international associations: the Société Européenne pour l'Astronomie dans la Culture (SEAC), the International Society for Archaeoastronomy and Astronomy in Culture (ISAAC) and the Inter-American Society of Astronomy in Culture (SIAC). On the other hand, we will take advantage of the event that will be realized in September 2017 in Santiago de Compostela, Spain, between the ISAAC, the SEAC and the INSAPIEC – Inspiration of Astronomical Phenomena International Executive Committee- in order to debate the proposed criteria and involve the entire academic community that is related to cultural astronomy.

Alejandro López, Argentina

30 November 2016