

DIVISION C / WORKING GROUP ASTRONOMICAL HERITAGE IN DANGER

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TRIENNIAL REPORT 2016-2018

1. Motivation and Creation of the Working Group

The working group has been conformed 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.

2. Main Remarks

During the year 2016 and 2017 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 contrast 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 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, Chile, Brazil, Ecuador, Mexico, Libya, Lebanon, Iraq, Egypt, Syria, Turkey and Jordan.

We participated in two important events of the cultural astronomy academic community. The first one took place in September 2017 in Santiago de Compostela, Spain, between the ISAAC, the SEAC and the INSAPIEC -Inspiration of Astronomical Phenomena International Executive Committee-. The second one, took place in November 2017 in Perú, it was the Jornadas Interamericanas de Astronomía en la Cultura (Interamerican Conference of Astronomy in Culture), organized by the Sociedad Interamericana de Astronomía en la Cultura, SIAC, (Interamerican Society of Astronomy in Culture). In these meetings we had the opportunity of promoting the participation in the construction of the list and sharing interesting insights about the proposed criteria to make the list.

3. Future

The international academic community of Cultural Astronomy has been invited to contribute with potential sites to the list. 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). We will take advantage of the events that will be realized in August 2018 in Vienna, Austria by the IAU and the SEAC, and in October 2018 in Sajama, Bolivia by the SIAC, in order to debate the proposed criteria and involve the entire academic community that is related to cultural astronomy. We believe that the continuation of the group's work in the next years is very important. The collection of basic data to make up the list of astronomical heritage sites of humanity at risk is just beginning. It is necessary to achieve greater dissemination of the initiative among the academic community, especially among those engaged in cultural astronomy. We also hope to achieve an exchange with the WGs of Astronomy and Development and Education.

Also it is necessary to achieve greater visibility within the community of professional and amateur astronomers. In this sense, it is key to put them in contact with the results of the investigations of those who dedicate themselves to cultural astronomy. This can show them the relevance of issues related to identity, ethnic and cultural conflicts and colonialism for astronomical heritage. It is an interdisciplinary task that requires the collaboration of experts from different areas of knowledge. It also requires dialogue with local communities and first-hand knowledge of their knowledge, values and challenges. It is important to expand the number of group members in the next few years. Given its interdisciplinary nature it becomes crucial to find more agile mechanisms to incorporate people who do not belong to the IAU and / or are not astronomers. Another point of great importance is that the future WG work should help to promote that the astronomical developments (such as observatories) driven by universities or international consortiums favor the visibility of local astronomical traditions and traditional astronomical sites and landscapes. Similarly, we believe that the activity of the WG should promote that these astronomical developments incorporate, from their very first stages, specific and effective protocols of informed prior consultation. In this sense we think that the astronomers who participate in the development of these projects should have the list as an input

that allows them to see other ways of looking at the sky and the social context in which astronomical knowledge is inscribed. For this reason, in the next few years, we hope to be able to increase the number of sites on the list and publicize them.