

# Recognizing Associative Values in World Heritage

Christina CAMERON

## *Abstract*

With the increased interest in the commemoration of sites of memory, including battlefields and sites of genocide, UNESCO's World Heritage Centre commissioned an expert study in 2018 to clarify the way criterion (vi) is applied to recognize the associative values at nominated properties. The study was intended to facilitate knowledge-based decision-making for properties with strong associative values. This paper outlines the lack of clarity and the World Heritage Committee's concerns about the definition and application of criterion (vi). After documenting the evolution in the wording of criterion (vi), the article explains the important contribution of the 2018 report, in particular its analysis of 240 statements of Outstanding Universal Value that have used criterion (vi). It concludes that further studies should focus on the analysis of the 240 World Heritage sites using precedents from previous inscriptions and case studies to theorize the six associations of criterion (vi), namely events, living traditions, ideas, beliefs, artistic works and literary works. Such research should also address methodologies for protecting and managing the attributes of associative values. These additional studies would support more consistent and knowledgeable use of criterion (vi) and thereby enhance the recognition and protection of associative values at World Heritage sites.

**Keywords:** World Heritage, associative values, criterion (vi), ICOMOS.

## **Introduction**

The World Heritage Convention (1972) identifies, protects and conserves places of Outstanding Universal Value for the benefit of present and future generations. The determination of whether or not a property meets the threshold of Outstanding Universal Value is made by the World Heritage Committee (WHC) using "such criteria as it shall establish" (UNESCO 1972: art. 11.2). The Committee uses ten criteria to make that determination. Criterion (vi) is special because it is used to identify significant associative values directly related to a property.

In 2018 UNESCO's World Heritage Centre commissioned an expert study to clarify the way criterion (vi) should be applied to recognize the associative values at nominated properties (Cameron and Herrmann 2018: 1-89). With an increasing interest in the commemoration of sites of memory, including battlefields and sites of genocide, the study was intended to recommend changes to improve the application of criterion (vi) and to facilitate knowledge-based decision-making for properties with strong associative values. This paper



outlines the evolution in the definition and application of criterion (vi) and suggests how it might be used in the future.

Criterion (vi) is unique among the ten criteria used to inscribe sites to the World Heritage List. While all criteria for assessing Outstanding Universal Value have to some extent an associative element, criterion (vi) explicitly recognizes the “outstanding universal significance” of the associative dimension of World Heritage sites. In other words, unlike the other nine criteria which identify the significance of the site itself, the assessment of criterion (vi) is carried out in three distinct phases. First, the outstanding universal significance of the association must be demonstrated; secondly, the nature of the direct or tangible link between such associations and the property must be evaluated; thirdly, a comparison with other similar associations and their links to the site needs to be carried out. Due to its special character, criterion (vi) has often been debated by UNESCO’s WHC and by heritage practitioners around the world.(UNESCO 1977b: 7(vi) (Table 1)).

### **Evolution of criterion (vi)**

In the early years, when the World Heritage Convention began to operationalize its activities in 1976 and 1977, selection criteria needed to be created. In fulfilling their role as advisory bodies to the Convention, ICOMOS, ICCROM and IUCN prepared draft criteria for consideration by the Committee. In the case of criterion (vi), ICOMOS proposed that “the property should be most importantly associated with persons, events, philosophies or religions of outstanding historical significance.” To illustrate its proposal, ICOMOS referred to the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem, the Holy Places of Mecca and Medina, and the launching pad for the first voyage to the moon at Cape Kennedy (UNESCO 1977a: 20 (v)). At its 1977 session, the Committee revised the wording of the ICOMOS proposal, replacing “philosophies or religions” with “ideas or beliefs”, so that a property should “be most importantly associated with ideas or beliefs, with events or with persons, of outstanding historical importance or significance” (UNESCO 1977b: 7 (vi) (Table 1)).

Two years later, faced with difficulties in applying the criteria and concerned about a surge in nominations that had already reached over one hundred properties, the World Heritage Committee asked its Rapporteur Michel Parent, a member of the French delegation, to review the current situation and prepare advice on principles and criteria for inscription. His analysis examined several specific questions and illustrated them with examples from the nominations already in hand.

Table 1. Amendments to criterion (vi) in the various versions of the *Operational Guidelines for the implementation of the World Heritage Convention, 1977-2017* (Cameron and Herrmann 2018: 6.)

Date	The wording of criterion (vi)
1977	“be most importantly associated with ideas or beliefs, with events or with persons, of outstanding historical importance or significance”
1980	“be <b>directly or tangibly</b> associated with events or with ideas or beliefs of outstanding <b>universal</b> significance ( <b>the Committee considered that this criterion should justify inclusion in the List only in exceptional circumstances or in conjunction with other criteria</b> ).”
1983	“be directly or tangibly associated with events or with ideas or beliefs of outstanding universal significance (the Committee <b>considers</b> that this criterion should justify inclusion in the List only in exceptional circumstances or in conjunction with other criteria).”
1994	“be directly or tangibly associated with events or <b>living traditions</b> , with ideas, or with beliefs, <b>with artistic and literary works</b> of outstanding universal significance (the Committee considered that this criterion should justify inclusion in the List only in exceptional circumstances or in conjunction with other criteria).”
1996	“be directly or tangibly associated with events or living traditions, with ideas, or with beliefs, with artistic and literary works of outstanding universal significance (the Committee considered that this criterion should justify inclusion in the List only in exceptional circumstances or in conjunction with other criteria <b>cultural or natural</b> ).”
1997	“be directly or tangibly associated with events or living traditions, with ideas, or with beliefs, with artistic and literary works of outstanding universal significance (the Committee considered that this criterion should justify inclusion in the List only in exceptional circumstances <b>and</b> in conjunction with other criteria cultural or natural).”
2005	“be directly or tangibly associated with events or living traditions, with ideas, or with beliefs, with artistic and literary works of outstanding universal significance (The Committee considers that this criterion should <b>preferably be used</b> in conjunction with other criteria).”

Concerning criterion (vi), he used the United States nomination of Edison National Historic site to reflect on the principle concerning the inscription of sites associated with great scholars, artists, writers or statesmen. He cautioned against letting the World Heritage List “become a sort of competitive Honours Board for the famous men of different countries”:

The letter of the Convention does not rule out such a possibility, but it is a question of basic expediency that the List ... must concentrate not so much on the endless places which have been the theatre of the passing glories of men ... as on the great works which they have created (UNESCO 1979a: annex, 22).



In line with Michel Parent's advice, the 1979 session of the Committee expressed its concerns about potential inflation of the World Heritage list, a narrow focus on national interests and potential politicization of the process. It, therefore, directed that:

Particular attention should be given to cases which fall under criterion (vi) so that the net result would not be a reduction in the value of the List, due to the large potential number of nominations as well as to political difficulties. Nominations concerning, in particular, historical events or famous people could be strongly influenced by nationalism and other particularisms in contradiction with the objectives of the World Heritage Convention (UNESCO 1979b: 35 (v)).

As a result, the Committee made changes to its 1980 *Operational Guidelines*, by deleting "persons" from the list of associations while adding a requirement for a direct or tangible link between a property and its associations, and emphasizing the need for universality. The most important change was to add a restrictive clause to criterion (vi). The new formulation, with changes shown in bold, required that a property "be **directly or tangibly** associated with events or with ideas or beliefs of outstanding **universal** significance (**the Committee considered that this criterion should justify inclusion in the List only in exceptional circumstances or in conjunction with other criteria**)" (UNESCO 1980: 18 (vi)).

Criterion (vi) was not significantly amended until 1992 after the World Heritage Committee adopted an innovative and influential cultural landscapes category (UNESCO 1992: 2). The addition of "living traditions" and "artistic and literary works" to criterion (vi) aimed at facilitating the inscription of cultural landscapes, particularly associative cultural landscapes which drew their significance from "powerful religious, artistic or cultural associations of the natural element rather than material cultural evidence, which may be insignificant or even absent" (UNESCO 1994: 39 (iii)). The revised wording for criterion (vi) states that the property should "be directly or tangibly associated with events or **living traditions**, with ideas, or with beliefs, **with artistic and literary works** of outstanding universal significance (the Committee considered that this criterion should justify inclusion in the List only in exceptional circumstances or in conjunction with other criteria)" (UNESCO 1994: 24 (vi)). (UNESCO 1994: 39(iii)).

The Committee continued to be concerned about the possible inflation of the World Heritage list through the application of criterion (vi) alone. In 1996, a minor change to "other criteria" was meant to clarify the situation of Tongariro National Park, New Zealand which was initially listed in 1990 under natural criteria and

re-listed in 1993 using cultural criterion (vi) to recognize the property's spiritual significance for the Maori people (Figure 1). The new wording required the property to "be directly or tangibly associated with events or living traditions, with ideas, or with beliefs, with artistic and literary works of outstanding universal significance (the Committee considered that this criterion should justify inclusion in the List only in exceptional circumstances or in conjunction with other criteria **cultural or natural**)" (UNESCO 1996: 24 (vi)).

But in 1997, a major change expressly prohibited the use of criterion (vi) alone. This modification was triggered by the controversial 1996 inscription of Japan's Hiroshima Peace Memorial (Genbaku Dome) (Figure 2). Some countries disagreed with the World Heritage Committee's decision to inscribe the site on an exceptional basis under criterion (vi) alone. As a result, the Committee revised the wording to make it impossible to use criterion (vi) without other criteria. The 1997 amendment required the property to "be directly or tangibly associated with events or living traditions, with ideas, or with



**Figure 1.** Mount Tongariro National Park World Heritage site, New Zealand (CC BY-SA 4.0 AndyIH – Wikimedia Commons).

beliefs, with artistic and literary works of outstanding universal significance (the Committee considered that this criterion should justify inclusion in the List only in exceptional circumstances **and** in conjunction with other criteria cultural or natural)" (UNESCO 1997: 24 (vi)).

Criticism about the restrictive use of criterion (vi) gathered strength at an expert meeting in Zimbabwe where participants argued that it encouraged more monumental heritage and disadvantaged sites associated with spiritual, indigenous and artistic values. The Zimbabwe meeting recommended that the criterion be opened up "due to the specific spiritual character of some potential African World Heritage sites." Noting that the restrictive wording prevented the use of criterion (vi) for living heritage without the use of another criterion, participants proposed to add the word "preferably" to criterion (vi), thereby putting it on an equal stand-alone basis with other criteria. (UNESCO 2000: 14, 34).

Since the Operational Guidelines document is a living instrument that reflects changes in heritage conservation practice, the World Heritage



Committee periodically modified it on an ad hoc basis, starting with the first iteration in 1977. As a result, the guidelines were increasingly criticized for being confused, inconsistent and poorly structured. In 1999 a decision was made to completely overhaul the document (UNESCO 1999: VIII). What was meant to be a one-year exercise dragged on for several years, involving expert meetings, Committee discussions and eventually an extraordinary session of the World Heritage Committee to deal with unresolved issues, among them the wording of criterion (vi).



**Figure 2.** Hiroshima Peace Memorial (Genbaku Dome) World Heritage site, Japan, © UNESCO Giovanni Boccardi.

The final discussion on criterion (vi) occurred during the 2004 extraordinary meeting of the World Heritage Committee. In the debate, some members, including the United Kingdom, France, Zimbabwe and Nigeria supported unrestricted wording for the criterion (vi). The French representative took the position that “the historical significance of property alone could legitimize the use of criterion (vi) [and]

for certain places not covered by other criteria, it was important to be able to apply this criterion on its own” (UNESCO 2004: 43-45). Other members proposed a compromise by adding the word “preferably”. When the revised *Operational Guidelines* were eventually published in 2005, the actual wording was even more open. The restrictive approach was softened by the deletion of “only in exceptional circumstances” and the addition of a preference to use it in conjunction with other criteria. The new wording stated that a property should “be directly or tangibly associated with events or living traditions, with ideas, or with beliefs, with artistic and literary works of outstanding universal significance (The Committee considers that this criterion should **preferably be used** in conjunction with other criteria)” (UNESCO 2005: 77 (vi)).

Although the wording of criterion (vi) has not been amended since 2005, debates about its meaning and application continue to swirl. The old question of recognizing persons—the “competitive Honours Board for famous men”—emerged again in 2007 with the nomination of Darwin at Downe (United Kingdom) (Figure 3). The Committee deferred the nomination to

encourage further reflection. The ensuing expert meeting on scientific heritage emphasized the importance of linking the scientific ideas to tangible features of the property, not just to the person who discovered them (UNESCO 2008). Two years later, a second discussion on the nomination, now called Darwin's Landscape Laboratory, revealed on-going discomfort with the application of criterion (vi). As a result, the World Heritage Committee called for another meeting to deliberate on "sites presenting Outstanding Universal Value, essentially on an associative basis" (UNESCO 2010).

This request materialized at the international expert meeting on criterion (vi) and associative values held in Warsaw, Poland from 28-30 March 2012. Discussions focused on the methodology for assessing the use of criterion (vi) and definitions of the attributes of the six



**Figure 3** Darwin at Down House, United Kingdom (CC BY snowmanradio – Wikimedia Commons).

associations: events, living traditions, ideas, beliefs, artistic works, literary works. The Warsaw meeting broke new ground by examining post-inscription challenges of protecting and conserving associative values of properties. The experts concluded that the maintenance of the authenticity of such sites would require a full understanding of the associative values. Besides, they underscored the need to involve local communities, Indigenous peoples and other stakeholders, particularly if they have the first responsibility for the property and if protection depends on traditional management systems and the use of traditional knowledge (UNESCO 2012b).

The World Heritage Committee accepted the recommendation from the Warsaw meeting to develop supplementary advice for the World Heritage resource manuals and carry out "thematic studies on certain types of sites with associative values, such as sacred sites and those associated with the heritage of science" (UNESCO 2012a). The 2018 report on *Guidance and Capacity Building for the Recognition of Associative Values using World Heritage criterion (vi)* constitutes a partial response. The Cameron-Herrmann report considers the evolution of the concept of the associative value and the relationship of criterion (vi) to other inscription criteria as well as the World



Heritage Global Strategy for a representative, balanced and credible World Heritage list. A key contribution is an in-depth study of 240 statements of Outstanding Universal Value that have used criterion (vi) alone or with other criteria. These statements have been analyzed systematically to determine the attributes linked to the six associations in criterion (vi) (Cameron and Herrmann 2018: 1-89). While this report prepares the groundwork, more work needs to be done.

In order to contribute to more robust guidance in World Heritage manuals and tools, further research is needed to expand the findings of the Cameron-Herrmann report. If specific guidance is needed on the use of criterion (vi) for sites of memory and conflict, scholarly studies should be undertaken, using precedents from previous inscriptions and case studies to theorize the six associations, namely events, living traditions, ideas, beliefs, artistic works and literary works. Such research should also address methodologies for protecting and managing the attributes of associative values. These additional studies could support more consistent and knowledgeable use of criterion (vi) and thereby enhance the recognition and protection of associative values at World Heritage sites.

### References

- Cameron, C. and J. Herrmann (2018). *Guidance and Capacity Building for the Recognition of Associative Values using World Heritage criterion (vi)*. Paris: UNESCO World Heritage Centre. Online: [whc.unesco.org/en/nominations](http://whc.unesco.org/en/nominations).
- UNESCO (1972) = UNESCO. *Convention concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage*. Paris: UNESCO.
- UNESCO (1977a) = UNESCO. CC-77/CONF.001/4. Paris. Online: [whc.unesco.org/archive/1977/cc-77-conf001-4e.pdf](http://whc.unesco.org/archive/1977/cc-77-conf001-4e.pdf).
- UNESCO (1977b) = UNESCO. *Operational Guidelines for the implementation of the World Heritage Convention*. Paris: UNESCO. Online: [whc.unesco.org/en/guidelines/](http://whc.unesco.org/en/guidelines/).
- UNESCO (1979a) = UNESCO. "Principles and criteria for inclusion of properties on World Heritage List, of properties on the World Heritage List," CC-79/conf.003/11. Paris. Online: [whc.unesco.org/archive/1979/cc-79-conf003-11e.pdf](http://whc.unesco.org/archive/1979/cc-79-conf003-11e.pdf)
- UNESCO (1979b) = UNESCO. "Report of the Rapporteur on the 3rd session of the World Heritage Committee held in Cairo and Luxor, 22-26 October 1979," CC-79/CONF.003/13, Paris. Online: [whc.unesco.org/archive/1979/cc-79-conf003-13e.pdf](http://whc.unesco.org/archive/1979/cc-79-conf003-13e.pdf)
- UNESCO (1980) = UNESCO. *Operational Guidelines for the implementation of the World Heritage Convention*. Paris. Online: [whc.unesco.org/en/guidelines/](http://whc.unesco.org/en/guidelines/).



- UNESCO (1992) = UNESCO. "Report of the Rapporteur on the 16<sup>th</sup> session of the World Heritage Committee held in Santa Fe, 12-17-14 December 1992," WHC-92/CONF.002/12. Santa Fe. Online: [whc.unesco.org/archive/1992/whc-92-conf002-12e.pdf](http://whc.unesco.org/archive/1992/whc-92-conf002-12e.pdf)
- UNESCO (1994) = UNESCO. *Operational Guidelines for the implementation of the World Heritage Convention*. Paris. Online: [whc.unesco.org/en/guidelines/](http://whc.unesco.org/en/guidelines/).
- UNESCO (1996) = UNESCO. *Operational Guidelines for the implementation of the World Heritage Convention*. Paris. Online: [whc.unesco.org/en/guidelines/](http://whc.unesco.org/en/guidelines/).
- UNESCO (1997) = UNESCO. *Operational Guidelines for the implementation of the World Heritage Convention*. Paris. Online: [whc.unesco.org/en/guidelines/](http://whc.unesco.org/en/guidelines/).
- UNESCO (1999) = UNESCO. "Report of the Rapporteur on the 23rd session of the Bureau of the World Heritage Committee held in Paris, 5-10 July 1999," WHC-99/CONF.209/4. Paris. Online: [whc.unesco.org/archive/1999/whc-99-conf209-4e.pdf](http://whc.unesco.org/archive/1999/whc-99-conf209-4e.pdf)
- UNESCO (2000) = UNESCO. "Synthetic Report of the Meeting on Authenticity and Integrity in an African context, Great Zimbabwe National Monument, Zimbabwe, 26-29 May 2000," WHC-2000/CONF.204/INF.11. Paris. Online: [whc.unesco.org/archive/2000/whc-00-conf204-inf11e.pdf](http://whc.unesco.org/archive/2000/whc-00-conf204-inf11e.pdf)
- UNESCO (2004) = UNESCO. "Summary Report of the 6th extraordinary session of the World Heritage Committee held in Paris, 17-22 March 2003," WHC-03/6 EST.COM/Inf.8. Paris. Online: <http://whc.unesco.org/archive/2003/whc03-6extcom-inf08e.pdf>
- UNESCO (2005) = UNESCO. *Operational Guidelines for the implementation of the World Heritage Convention*. Paris. Online: [whc.unesco.org/en/guidelines/](http://whc.unesco.org/en/guidelines/).
- UNESCO (2008) = UNESCO. "Science and technology, an expert workshop within the framework of the global strategy for the global, balanced and representative World Heritage List," WHC-08/32.COM/INF.10 A. Paris. Online: [whc.unesco.org/archive/2008/whc08-32com-inf10Ae.pdf](http://whc.unesco.org/archive/2008/whc08-32com-inf10Ae.pdf)
- UNESCO (2010) = UNESCO. "Decisions adopted at the 34th session of the World Heritage Committee (Brasilia, 2010)," WHC-10/34.COM/20, 8B.31. Paris. Online: [whc.unesco.org/archive/2010/whc10-34com-20e.pdf](http://whc.unesco.org/archive/2010/whc10-34com-20e.pdf)
- UNESCO (2012a) = UNESCO. "Decisions adopted by the World Heritage Committee at its 36th session (Saint-Petersburg, 2012)," WHC-12/36.COM/19. St. Petersburg. Online: [whc.unesco.org/archive/2012/whc12-36com-19e.pdf](http://whc.unesco.org/archive/2012/whc12-36com-19e.pdf)
- UNESCO (2012b) = UNESCO. "Report of the International World Heritage expert meeting on criterion (vi) and associative values (Warsaw, Poland, 28-30 March 2012)". Online: [whc.unesco.org/uploads/events/documents/event-827-15.pdf](http://whc.unesco.org/uploads/events/documents/event-827-15.pdf)



## Recunoașterea valorilor asociative în patrimoniul mondial

### Rezumat

Odată cu creșterea interesului pentru comemorarea siturilor de memorie, inclusiv a câmpurilor de luptă și a siturilor genocidului, Centrul Patrimoniului Mondial UNESCO a comandat un studiu de expertiză în anul 2018 pentru a clarifica modul în care se aplică criteriul (vi) pentru recunoașterea valorilor asociative ale proprietățile nominalizate pentru înscrierea în Lista patrimoniului mondial. Studiul a fost destinat să faciliteze luarea deciziilor bazate pe cunoștințe pentru proprietăți cu valori asociative puternice. Acest document subliniază lipsa de claritate și preocupările Comitetului Patrimoniului Mondial cu privire la definirea și aplicarea criteriului (vi). După ce a documentat evoluția formulării criteriului (vi), articolul explică contribuția importantă a raportului din 2018, în special analiza sa a 240 de declarații ale valorii universale excepționale care au folosit criteriul (vi). Articolul concluzionează că studiile ulterioare ar trebui să se axeze pe analiza celor 240 de situri ale Patrimoniului Mondial folosind precedente din nominalizările anterioare și studii de caz pentru a teoretiza cele șase asociații de criterii (vi), respectiv evenimente, tradiții vii, idei, credințe, opere artistice și opere literare. O asemenea cercetare ar trebui să abordeze metodologiile de protecție și gestionare a atributelor valorilor asociative. Aceste studii suplimentare ar sprijini utilizarea mai consistentă și mai cunosătoare a criteriului (vi) și, prin urmare, ar spori recunoașterea și protecția valorilor asociative pe siturile Patrimoniului Mondial.

**Cuvinte cheie:** Patrimoniu Mondial, valori asociative, criteriu (vi), ICOMOS

**Christina Cameron**, University of Montreal,  
e-mail: [christina.cameron@umontreal.ca](mailto:christina.cameron@umontreal.ca)