



II CONGRESO INTERNACIONAL DE BUENAS PRÁCTICAS EN
PATRIMONIO MUNDIAL: PERSONAS Y COMUNIDADES
29-30 ABRIL, 1 MAYO 2015

Pre-Actas del II Congreso Internacional de Buenas Prácticas en Patrimonio Mundial: personas y comunidades. (Documento de uso restringido, destinado exclusivamente a su visualización)

Pre-proceedings of the Second International Conference on Best Practices in World Heritage: People and Communities. (Document Restricted only for visual use)

OPENING LECTURE

CLAIRE SMITH . Flinders University, Australia.

Terrorism, New Media and World Heritage

ABSTRACT

This paper discusses an emergent threat to World Heritage sites. Throughout history the symbolic function of cultural icons has made them a target for destruction. Recent changes in the nature of warfare and the modern media landscape, however, have greatly increased the vulnerability of cultural icons in times of conflict. Unlike nation-state warfare, which traditionally emphasizes conquering or acquiring key resources or territory, small, dispersed groups driven by political and religious ideologies propel contemporary conflicts. Such dispersed conflicts mean that international conventions between state parties are increasingly irrelevant. Moreover, the media landscape has opened up new, global channels of user-led communication. The media strategies of terrorist organisations allow powerful messages to reach massive numbers of people. There is no chain of command and no membership role—only a shared philosophy and a message to take action individually. This new trend of sequestered action, in which individuals act without direction from an organisation but as part of a general ideological movement, protects terrorists from detection and widens their potential effect. Their impact is enhanced by the global visibility of their actions. However, while few people are willing to kill, many more would be willing to destroy a cultural monument. Taken together, these transformations have created a new context in which the destruction of cultural icons can be a relatively low-risk choice for extremists seeking maximum impact for their political agendas. As such, new media constitutes a fresh—and currently under-rated—threat to cultural icons, World Heritage sites will be increasingly vulnerable. The destruction of cultural heritage will remain a problem as long as cultural patrimony—and indeed World Heritage—is shaped primarily by Anglo-European concepts of heritage, and consequently aligned with a positional of the West. The very notion of World Heritage needs to be interrogated from the viewpoint of non-Western countries.