



Aerospace History and World Heritage

Aerospace History and World Heritage has been the topic of a side event of the 39th session of the World Heritage Committee in Bonn, organized by the German Commission for UNESCO, the German Aerospace Center (DLR) and the UNESCO World Heritage Center. Some 60 high-level participants engaged in a lively discussion. Short presentations were given by Lutz Möller of the German Commission for UNESCO, Berndt Feuerbacher of DLR and Anna Sidorenko of UNESCO.

The most important result was wide consensus that there is a need to consider sites which are important to Aerospace History in the context of the World Heritage Convention. Because of several peculiarities of the Aerospace History, it seems particularly wise in this context to consider, wherever possible, only transnational serial nominations, once there is sufficient progress on the issue. There has also been wide consensus that a Thematic Study would be very expedient, focusing maybe on some sub-classes of Aerospace Heritage (e.g. Aeronautical test sites, Airports, Rocket development centers, Launch sites, Historical ground operations facilities). The exceptional architectural and engineering value of several sites related to aerospace technology is obvious; OUV potential requires more analysis.

A corresponding network of focal points should be established immediately. The first step is to establish a close network of international experts to support joint approaches and mutual understanding. Everybody who would like to join this network should address a.sidorenko@unesco.org.

The side event recalled that aerospace History had been mentioned already by the ICOMOS gaps study in 2004. However, so far it has received rather limited specific attention only, it has been discussed mainly in the circle of dedicated experts, e.g. in the context of the “50th anniversary of the Sputnik”. Most States Parties are still very much at the beginning of the process of identifying Heritage sites.

Aerospace Heritage faces a couple of specific challenges:

- The usual limitations of all sites related to the history of sciences and technology (and applicability of the ten criteria). The most important elements of S&T sites are often moveable and have been removed by modernization of labs; airplanes and spacecrafts are moveable in the most important sense.
- Aerospace Heritage sites are often not recognized as heritage sites and are not protected by regulatory and legal provisions; there are only few specific heritage laws towards technological installations; visitors often do not have access.
- The importance of civil engineering architecture as a category in its own right in the context of World Heritage is not yet fully recognized.
- Aerospace history, especially its early days, is closely entangled with military use and warfare; in some cases with crimes against humanity.

Aerospace Heritage also has a number of specific benefits to be discussed in the context of World Heritage:

- Aerospace technology has opened entirely new dimensions for mankind. It has helped us to see our planet from above; it has allowed humans to leave the surface of the Earth.
- This technology, like no other, has really helped us to physically get closer to each other, to overcome the limits of the physical distance. Cultures have moved much closer together; we have enhanced mobility, transport, communication, science.
- Aerospace technology has allowed us to understand our planet as a fragile system and to what extent we have altered the planet.
- Every astronaut, every cosmonaut and every taikonaut has reported on the unique experience of orbiting the Earth a couple of times and no more seeing their individual country, but the planet as a whole. Aerospace technology confronts us particularly critically with the fact that we as human beings need to overcome conflicts. Aerospace technology fosters peace.
- Aerospace technology allows us to investigate and to protect World Heritage, through Remote Sensing.