Prospects for World Heritage in the equatorial and south-western Pacific region

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Abstract

In the interval between the 2003 and 2012 World Heritage (WH) periodic reporting cycles for the Asia-Pacific region some ten properties were successfully inscribed on the WH list, seven of them cultural. In 2017 another cultural site, Taputapuātea (France, French Polynesia), was inscribed. The inscriptions are a considerable achievement that built on themes and thematic frameworks developed for the Pacific. With the exception of Taputapuātea and some Oceanic nominations, the support for the Pacific WH programme has waned since the 2012 reporting cycle. There are still many properties that could be placed on existing tentative lists and there are some tentative lists to be developed. The two thematic frameworks, for cultural landscapes (2007) and early human expansion (2010) in the Pacific, have yet to be fully deployed to improve tentative lists. A review of these achievements and issues shows that only Vanuatu, New Zealand and Papua New Guinea have adequate tentative lists and each state party in the Region needs to identify the key hurdles to successful nomination and prepare documents such as statements of values, reviews of authenticity and integrity and documentation of customary management that could be incorporated into nomination documents.

Introduction

State parties with properties in the Pacific region fall into two UNESCO/World Heritage regions: Asia-Pacific and the Americas. The Galapagos Islands (Ecuador) and Rapa Nui (Chile) are two inscriptions from the Americas that will be mentioned. There are several in Japan, Canada and Mexico that have Pacific dimensions that will not be brought into the scope.

This paper reviews thematic studies for the Pacific Island Countries (PICs), the periodic reporting for Asia-Pacific and the Americas and the state of the tentative lists for the various PICs including Australia and New Zealand. Suggestions are made for some future steps to achieve more nominations. There remain questions about sources of future funding, the policy direction of the ‘metropolitan’ countries and indeed the World Heritage Committee (WHC) in their role in Pacific WH, and governmental capacity for many PICs.

The mandate to small countries to nominate for World Heritage has been diluted in the last decade by UNESCO itself and by other agencies. World classifications for documents, intangible heritage, the dark skies initiative and cities of literature, not to speak of the World Monuments Fund listings, have tempered the effort applied to World Heritage even while they try to emulate its success.
Thematic studies

At Port Vila, Vanuatu, in 2005, Pacific Island Country (PIC) representatives identified the following regional themes for the Pacific region: 1. Associative Cultural Landscapes of stories that explain the origin and development of social structures in the Pacific; 2. Cultural Landscapes related to cultivation in the Pacific; and 3. Lapita expansion (see Table 1). Some specific sub-themes were identified and site types and properties that might represent them were listed (ICOMOS Paris 2005).

There has been, in the decade or more since the list at Table 1 was made at Port Vila, a remarkable achievement of inscriptions from the list: Kuk (PNG), Taputapuātea (French Polynesia), Nan Madol (Pohnpei, FSM), Roi Mata Cultural Landscape (Vanuatu), Levuka (Fiji), Rock Islands (Palau), Banaba/Ocean Island (Kiribati) and Bikini Atoll (RMI). The Phoenix Islands (Kiribati) inscription was the focus of one of a number of workshops on oceanic nominations at this time which also led to the Papahānaumokuākea (NW Hawaiian Is) (USA) inscription.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Sub-themes</th>
<th>Site types</th>
<th>Specific sites</th>
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<tr>
<td>1. Early human expansion and innovation in the Pacific</td>
<td>Early settlement of Neolithic</td>
<td>Lapita sites, Archaeological sites, Burial sites, Anthropogenic landscapes, Canoe landings</td>
<td>Lapita sites in PNG, Vanuatu, Solomon, New Caledonia, Samoa, Tonga, Fiji, Wallis and Futuna</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Pacific societies</td>
<td>Origin stories, Warfare and peace-making, Traditional Settlements, Places that represent the origin and development of social structures, Nation building, Paths to and places of the affinal, Trade and exchange, Stories associated with mythical or historic figures, Tapasos (rakes), Landscape modification, Pacific cultivation, Fishing, Resource management</td>
<td>Traditional buildings e.g. houses, Habitation sites, Mound sites Fortifications, Associative Cultural Landscapes, Places of the dead, Places of exchange, Meeting places, Religious places, Ceremonial places, Places of storage, Places of traditional sports, Cultural routes, Men’s Sites, Women’s Sites, Fishing sites, Dry and wet horticultural landscapes</td>
<td>Levuka (Fiji), Red Mata cultural Landscape (Vanuatu), Kuk (PNG), Marovo lagoon irrigation (Vanuatu), Taputapuātea (French Polynesia), Nan Madol (FSM), Roi Mata Cultural Landscape (Vanuatu), Levuka (Fiji), Rock Islands (Palau), Banaba/Ocean Island (Kiribati) and Bikini Atoll (RMI)</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Polynesian Encounters (post European contact)</td>
<td>Movements of People, Early Trade, WW I and II, Cold War, Missionary endeavour, Exploration of the Pacific, Indigenous responses, Colonisation, Commerce and trade</td>
<td>Mission sites, Colonial settlements, Plantations, mines, Convict sites, Maritime infrastructure, Shipwrecks, Archaeological sites</td>
<td>Ulumahana (Fiji), Rangitukia Island (New Zealand), Bikini Atoll (RMI), Preservation Cove/Cove shipwreck (Vanuatu)</td>
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Table 1. Pacific WH themes and possible nominations indicated by the Port Vila Meeting 2005. Successful inscriptions since then are in bold type. Source: ICOMOS Paris 2005.

Figure 1. World Heritage inscriptions in the wider Pacific. An updated and searchable map may be found at: https://whc.unesco.org/en/interactive-map/
Since Port Vila 2005, there have been two ICOMOS-funded thematic studies which cover the Pacific region: one on cultural landscapes (Smith, Jones & Denyer 2007); and the second concerning early human expansion in the Pacific (Lilley 2010). The cultural landscapes study’s gazetteer (Smith, Jones & Denyer 2001) provides reasonably practicable proposals for additions to tentative lists in the relevant PICs. The early human expansion papers indicate many early-settlement sites that would be relevant to tentative lists but more thematic or areal analysis would be needed to clarify proposals that might be suitable for tentative lists. Overall, cultural landscapes or seascapes could be identified that would accommodate the somewhat problematic subject of first settlement and/or the subject of voyaging. A possible Micronesian serial cultural landscape between Yap (FSM) and Palau, the inscribed Roi Mata cultural landscape including its Lapita and other early ceramic sites, and possibly serial landscape sites in the Marquesas and the Tuamotu Archipelago are examples. Ancient (Lapita) settlement landscapes sealed in lagoon beds or under volcanic ash are other possibilities.

PICs currently without inscriptions and which may in due course have inscriptions are Tonga, Samoa and Cook Islands. Very small PICs (populations of less than 2,000) seem to have poor prospects.

All the Pacific WH properties which have been inscribed with associative cultural values also have strong monumental or field-monument values. The only property with associative cultural values and no particular monumental values is Tongariro. Bikini Atoll (Marshall Islands) has clear associative values akin to those of the Hiroshima Peace memorial (criterion vi. only) but is also inscribed under criterion iv as an outstanding example of a nuclear test site and its effects on indigenous peoples. The most recent inscription of the cultural landscape of Taputapuātea also has strong monumental values.

The connectedness of cultural and natural values has recently been reviewed by ICOMOS Paris. They concluded: ‘Connecting Practice has now reached a stage where successfully tested interventions need to be incorporated into policies, guidelines, institutional practices and other programmes’ (Leitão 2017).

An important role has been played by the metropolitan authorities (France, USA, China, Australia), the funds in trust, national and international nature NGOs, WHC and ICOMOS Paris. New Zealand despite its chairmanship of the WHC and funding of the 2006 committee meeting in this period under review has played a limited role. The New Zealand initiative to add the ‘5th C’ (Community) to the shaping principles of the WH Convention has arguably given a boost to community involvement in World Heritage programmes over and above that which prevailed before 2006. In Vanuatu it has been observed:

… tourism at Chief Roi Mata’s Domain is both more and less than a business. The Roi Mata Cultural Tours enterprise may always be less financially successful than it might otherwise become in the hands of others and, like all projects involving income generation, it will always be implicated in local and national politics, but its functions and influence extend far beyond the simple logic of income generation. Wisely managed, the tour is a force for conservation and the enhancement of cultural heritage values, providing a structured process through which the community can manage and ensure the transmission of those values…. (Wilson et al. 2012)

**Inscriptions in the Pacific region**

This list excludes natural properties other than those with potential cultural significance that could extend the scope of their inscriptions. Some inscriptions in the Americas region of UNESCO are included because of their position in the Pacific or importance in Pacific history.

**Australia**

- Lord Howe Island Group
- Wet Tropics of Queensland
- Fraser Island
- Australian Convict Sites
Only the cultural inscription for the serial convict sites of the wider Sydney area, and Norfolk Island in particular, have strong Pacific connections.

**Chile**
- Rapa Nui National Park
- Historic Quarter of the Seaport City of Valparaíso

Rapa Nui is one of the earliest WH inscriptions and reflects the long continuation of the emphasis on monumental sites in WH.

**Ecuador**
- Galápagos Islands

The archipelago is inscribed for natural values only and could be extended to cultural, particularly in relation to Charles Darwin’s discoveries and the writing of *The Origin of Species*. A recent reactive monitoring mission (Lethie and Bueno 2018) was to ‘assess the progress achieved by the State Party in addressing various issues, in particular those related to biosecurity and tourism which were raised by the [WH] Committee when it decided to remove the property from the List of World Heritage in Danger’. The mission made recommendations inter alia on management planning, biosecurity and tourism management.

**Fiji**
- Levuka Historical Port Town (Fig. 2)

Levuka is thematically akin to the Seaport City of Valparaíso.

![Figure 2. Marist presbytery, a building within the Levuka World Heritage site, Fiji. Kevin L. Jones.](image2)

![Figure 3. Taputapuātea, inscribed on the World Heritage list. Kevin L. Jones.](image3)
France
- Lagoons of New Caledonia: Reef Diversity and Associated Ecosystems
- Taputapuātea, Raiātea, French Polynesia (Fig. 3)

Kiribati
- Phoenix Islands Protected Area

Marshall Islands
- Bikini Atoll Nuclear Test Site

Micronesia (Federated States of)
- Nan Madol: Ceremonial Centre of Eastern Micronesia (Fig. 4), inscribed 2016 and also listed as in danger because of siltation and growth of mangroves and other vegetation affecting the structures. Unesco has noted:

  The main challenge of this World Heritage property is the enormity of the property and its accessibility, the difficulty in evaluating the structures and canals due to heavy vegetation cover, the understanding of the hydrology to have the canals working as they should once clearance has commenced, and the complexity of external expert help that the State Party will require to even start this process. (https://whc.unesco.org/en/decisions/6926)

New Zealand
- Tongariro National Park (natural property, subsequently inscribed as a cultural landscape; within the rohe/tribal boundary of Sir Tumu Te Heuheu former chairman of the WHC)
- Sub-Antarctic Islands (a natural property mentioned here because the islands include an important early Polynesian settlement site)

Palau
- Rock Islands Southern Lagoon (natural and cultural property)

Papua New Guinea
- Kuk Early Agricultural Site

Solomon Islands
- East Rennell (natural property but could be inscribed for its strong cultural associations)
United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland
- Henderson Island (natural property)

United States of America
- Hawaii Volcanoes National Park (natural property)
- Papahānaumokuākea (NW Hawaiian Is)

Vanuatu
- Chief Roi Mata’s Domain

Review of tentative lists

Tentative lists are the lists from which PICs intend to nominate places for WH listing and therefore give the best published indication of where nominations will come from in the next decade. The following list places on tentative lists with Pacific connections. Some initiatives within each relevant country are being made to advance nominations. Comment is made on the currency and/or need for updating the tentative lists where appropriate.

Australia
- In preparation for tentative list: Cape York (Aboriginal sites under consultation).

Cook Islands

Fiji
- Sigatoka Sand Dunes (26/10/1999)

Noted in Pacific cultural landscapes and the Early human expansion thematic studies. It is understood that the area’s nomination has been reviewed by officials of the World Heritage Centre and that the Fiji authorities have been advised that it could not be successfully inscribed.

France
- Sites funéraires et mémoriels de la Première Guerre Mondiale (Front Ouest) (France). WWI memorials on the Western Front, two New Zealand memorials and one Australian included; Samoa, Cook Islands, Fiji and French Polynesia would all have interests in these serial inscriptions. Australia and New Zealand should be liaising with France on any nomination that may eventuate.
- Les Iles Marquises (22/06/2010), a mixed site

Kiribati
No cultural sites on tentative list, but an important participant in the oceans initiative.

Republic of Marshall Islands (RMI)
- Likiep Village Historic District (24/10/2005)
- Mili Atoll Nature Conservancy (and Nadrikdrik) (24/10/2005)
- Northern Marshall Islands Atolls (24/10/2005)

RMI is an important participant in the oceans initiative.

Micronesia (Federated States of)
- Yapese Disk Money Regional Sites (29/12/2004)

Yapese Disk Money provides a potential serial site with quarry sites in Palau such as Uet el Daob ma Uet el Beluu and Chelechol ra Orrak in Airai State, both on the Palau tentative list but not within the Rock Islands southern lagoon inscription. A nomination is understood to have been prepared (see note in Smith 2012: 57) but it appears that no action has been taken on it. Long-distance Micronesian navigation sites is a possible further theme that should be deployed in relation to the quarrying and transport of stone money.
The Lelu ruins, Kosrae, now apparently not on the FSM tentative list, have always been regarded as a sister site to Nan Madol and were listed together on the tentative list. Lelu has less monumental values but a very good historical record from the 18th and 19th-century. In my view, Lelu remains a possible serial extension to Nan Madol.

There is some scope for Polynesian Outliers on the FSM tentative list, e.g., Kapingamarangi.

**New Zealand**

- Auckland Volcanic Fields (30/03/2007) (Fig. 5)
- Kerikeri Basin historic precinct (30/03/2007)
- Kermadec Islands and Marine reserve (30/03/2007) natural
- Napier Art Deco historic precinct (30/03/2007)
- Waitangi Treaty Grounds historic precinct (30/03/2007)
- Whakarua Moutere (North East Islands) (30/03/2007) natural

All of the New Zealand tentative listings have strong Polynesian dimensions including the natural proposals.

The Department of Conservation for the NZ state party commissioned Dr Ian Lochhead (an art and architectural historian) to write a report for consideration of Napier for WH inscription (Lochhead 2011). He concluded that Napier did not meet the criteria for WH inscription. In my view, three aspects of the report are problematic: (1) the interpretation of the criteria contained in the WH convention and the operational guidelines against the proposal is inadequate; (2) Lochhead asserts that Art Deco is not a movement or an interchange of ideas, and is simply a decorative style and architectural concept that gained world-wide popularity; in his view it cannot be compared for example to the social manifestos driving the modernist movement; (3) Lochhead gives limited consideration to the widespread changes in building practice such as the use of heavily reinforced concrete and structural steel after the Napier earthquake which were a considerable advance in the engineering of such materials in Modernist architecture.

Many of the Auckland Volcanic Cones are now owned by iwi (the local tribes) and the joint iwi/Auckland Council management authority actively supports a WH nomination. Nomination of the Waitangi Treaty Grounds is also supported by its management authority. Both nominations still need good studies on the statement of OUV, comparative examples, and authenticity and integrity.

**Niue Island**

No sites on tentative list.

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*Figure 5. Maungakiekie One Tree Hill, Auckland, on the New Zealand tentative list.*

Kevin L. Jones/Department of Conservation.
Palau
- Imeong Conservation Area (26/08/2004)
- Ouballang ra Ngebedech (Ngebedech Terraces) (26/08/2004)
- Tet el Bad (Stone Coffin) (26/08/2004)
- Yapease Quarry Sites (26/08/2004)

For the last, see notes on FSM above. Suggestions have been made for revisions of the tentative list but they have not been put into effect. The Rock Islands inscription was a nomination inserted into the tentative list without review of the four earlier tentative list sites.

Papua New Guinea
- Huon Terraces – Stairway to the Past (06/06/2006)
- Kokoda Track and Owen Stanley Ranges (06/06/2006)
- Upper Sepik River Basin (06/06/2006)

Australia and PNG are both pressing for inscription of the Kokoda Track.

Samoa
- Fagaloa Bay – Uafato Tiavea Conservation Zone (21/12/2006)
- Manono, Apolima and Nuulopa Cultural Landscape (21/12/2006)

It is understood that some efforts have been made to document resources at Fagaloa Bay but issues relating to suitable reserves remain to be resolved.

Samoa, American Samoa
See remarks on USA below.

Solomon Islands
- Marovo – Tetepare Complex (23/12/2008)
- Tropical Rainforest Heritage of Solomon Islands (23/12/2008)

Several cultural landscapes could be on tentative list including the Polynesian Outliers Bellona, East Rennell and Tikopia.

Timor-Leste
Newly subscribed (2017) to the World Heritage Convention and no tentative list has yet been developed. ICOMOS Pasifika or relevant state parties such as Australia could assist with the development of a tentative list.
Tonga
• Lapita Pottery Archaeological Sites (A national serial site for consideration as the Kingdom of Tonga’s contribution to a transnational serial site listing) (09/08/2007)
• The Ancient Capitals of the Kingdom of Tonga (09/08/2007) (Fig. 6)

The Ancient Capitals has been the subject of an intensive study which concluded that:

The opportunity to promote and preserve the tangible cultural heritage of Lapaha through WH nomination coincided, fortuitously, with the traditional leaders and Lapaha Council Inc.’s goal of using cultural heritage to strengthen community identity and an international research project on the physical remains of the Tu’i Tonga chiefdom. Progress with the nomination has been made in many areas with issues of cultural heritage actively managed by the Lapaha Council Inc. (Clark et al. 2012)

It is understood that this nomination is still in progress in Tonga.

Tuvalu
No tentative list.
United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland
No tentative listings in Pacific region.

United States of America
• Pacific Remote Islands Marine National Monument (12/04/2017)

Though the National Park Service and the State Historic Preservation Office system and its grant programmes, the USA has capacity to assist in the former dependencies such as the FSM and the Marshall Islands and direct roles in Guam and Eastern Samoa. Examples of sites are the latte structures on Guam and Tataga Matau (a prehistoric quarry and fortification landscape) on Tutuila, American Samoa.

Vanuatu
• The Nowon and Votwos of Ureparapara (05/10/2005)
• The President Coolidge (01/10/2004) – a WWII nomination prospect
• Yalo, Apialo and the sacred geography of Northwest Malakula (01/10/2004)

Periodic reporting 2003 and 2012

In 2003, periodic reporting for the Pacific emphasised the following recommendations.

• More PIC membership of the WH Convention.
• National inventories & Tentative Lists: few PICs have prepared a WH Tentative List.
• In some Pacific Island Countries (PIC) heritage conservation legislation exists in addition to traditional customary land and sea tenure and protection. National World Heritage Committees were recommended with the involvement of cultural and natural heritage agencies, traditional leaders and local communities.
• PICs are, and will continue to be, largely dependent on outside sources of funding for WH identification, protection and presentation.
• UNESCO is requested to make the necessary commitment for long-term staffing & consultant support at UNESCO Apia and at UNESCO Headquarters
• Appointment of a regional focal point/coordinator to co-ordinate the Pacific Sub-Regional World Heritage Programme.

Overall, many of these recommendations had been achieved by 2012, however the funding of the recommended UNESCO positions is still poor.

By 2012, in the properties of the Pacific Island States, no major flow of economic benefits had been seen following WH inscriptions. There is clear potential for realising greater benefits
in the form of employment and income, and sharing these benefits with local residents and communities (World Heritage Centre 2012, Section II, 4.4.5). This subject was the principal focus of a New Zealand aid project in 2012 (Cave et. al. 2012). Relatively simple steps to achieve big multiplier benefits from the Ha’amonga a Maui for the local community were identified as a priority. (NZ aid to Tonga has been a halting process and in Tonga and other PICs has now been focused on renewable energy development.)

Some properties reported societal valuing of heritage as a positive factor, such as the Australian Convict Sites (Australia), Kuk Early Agricultural Site (Papua New Guinea) and Chief Roi Mata’s Domain (Vanuatu). All these WH inscriptions protect values and attributes that are closely associated with national history and identity (World Heritage Centre 2012: 38).

In 2012 the following issues were highlighted in the periodic reporting as priorities for Asia and the Pacific at national level:

- A strict legal framework for the protection and management of heritage, as well as strong institutional fabric for effective implementation.
- More sustainable financial and human resources need to be secured and effective mechanisms to allocate funding to priority needs should be established. Better use of tourism income and partnership with the private sector should be also explored.
- Training should be continuously provided to increase capacity in conservation, education, risk preparedness, visitor management and community outreach, in particular.
- Strengthened awareness building of communities and key stakeholders (local communities, indigenous people, landowners, industries, general public) is needed especially in West and Central Asia and the Pacific Island States…. (World Heritage Centre 2012: 3).

Conclusions

There is scope to expand existing natural WH into cultural heritage. This is how Uluru-Katajuta and Tongariro became cultural landscapes, it can be done again, e.g. for East Rennell or the Galápagos.

Consideration could be given to extending cultural inscriptions into serial nominations. It is worth strengthening national and trans-national serial nominations in these regions:

- Polynésie Française/France/Tahiti/New Zealand/Cook Islands
- FSM/Palau
- Marine nominations

For sites on tentative lists, each state party needs to identify the key hurdles to nomination, including the quality of the key component documents of a nomination, and the state parties should keep a data base of these with a view to eventual nomination. Key components are:

- Statements of values under the criteria in the Operational Guidelines
- Comparative analyses
- Authenticity and integrity reports/statements
- Management and conservation plans
- Documentation on legal protection and research into and records of customary management
- The strength of local community support/legal protection

Australia ICOMOS, ICOMOS New Zealand and ICOMOS Pasifika could assist PICs with these roles.

If we are to rely on the existing tentative lists, then prospects for new inscriptions are somewhat limited except for New Zealand (where a good tentative list has languished for the most part), Papua New Guinea and Vanuatu. More work could be done on tentative lists for almost all PICs and the countries with strong metropolitan connections such as France, USA and the UK.
The properties listed in the cultural landscapes and early human expansion thematic studies prepared by ICOMOS should be combed through and checked for inclusion by the pertinent state parties. More thought is needed on how to define sites of early settlement, e.g. Lapita, e.g. where known Lapita horizons are buried under volcanic ash or lagoon sediments.

More thematic studies funded by the WHC Paris or by metropolitan state parties can be envisaged. Examples might be early settlement landscapes in Oceania and early Lapita landscapes in West Polynesia/Fiji developing further the two good thematic studies that have been done.

All PICs with ambitions for World Heritage need a senior administrator with a good understanding of the various interests at work supporting and opposing World Heritage and who is:

- Accountable for these activities and communicating upwards to the national authorities, assisting political advocates
- Ensuring that supporters at national level have the information and resources that they need
- Responsible for overall process, resourcing, keeping to timetable.

References


**Endnote**

1 The Oceans Initiative is a team of scientists on a mission to protect marine wildlife. http://oceansinitiative.org/