



Declaration on Museums and Cultural Landscapes 2016

Preamble

The Declaration on Museums and Cultural Landscapes is the result of a series of meetings organized by ICOM-SA and ICOMOS-SA, in response to the ICOM International Museum Day theme of *Museums and Cultural Landscapes*. The meetings were held in seven cities and towns spread over five provinces in April and May 2016, followed by a national workshop in August 2016 in Pretoria. In total, 155 people participated, some of them in more than one workshop. ICOM-SA and ICOMOS-SA members as well as non-members who participated in the meetings had the opportunity to contribute through electronic correspondence.

Though ICOM-SA and ICOMOS-SA acknowledge the influence of the broader discourse in the international heritage and museum community in formulating this document, it is our intention that it will be rooted in the challenges and opportunities facing South African society, the heritage and museum sector in particular. The document was influenced by events during 2015 and 2016, when the vandalism of statues and memorials placed museums and the heritage sector in the centre of the debate on political transformation. The workshop participants also noted the need for the heritage and museum sector to be integrated with social and economic development initiatives. Exploration of the concept of cultural landscapes is relevant in our endeavours to address these needs.

The concept of cultural landscapes refers to spaces where there is an interaction between human culture and places. This approach considers not only the sum of the individual parts, but the relationship between ecological and cultural systems. It acknowledges that people impact on nature and that the natural environment provides a framework within which culture evolves.

Borrowing from, and including, biological ecology, the Cultural Landscape approach sees diverse cultural traditions as constantly interacting, adapting and evolving. The South African landscape reflects geological history, a celebrated biological diversity and the story of human development. South Africans come from a variety of cultural backgrounds and all of these have borrowed from other traditions. Neither colonial nor indigenous narratives alone can capture the whole experience of an individual as these narratives are thoroughly intertwined, interconnected and to an extent inseparable. This approach allows a heritage conservation methodology that accommodates the complex layering of meaning attached to the landscape while considering the transformation and development needs of society. Understanding the relationship between people, cultures and

landscape is essential in developing heritage conservation programmes that generate benefits for the communities concerned.

Towards a new heritage conservation system for South Africa

Contemporary heritage conservation and management approaches follow a holistic approach that acknowledges the relationships between different elements of the landscape, whether man-made or natural, intangible or tangible. Public participation to identify these elements and the relationships between them is key to a cultural landscape approach.

While ICOM-SA and ICOMOS-SA take cognisance of the fragmented nature of the heritage and museum sector, it is crucial that relevant parties pursue the establishment of a forum where government, professional associations and private heritage and museum organisations can cooperate to ensure an integrated conservation approach. ICOM-SA and ICOMOS-SA undertake to consult with other heritage and museum stakeholders regarding appropriate models for, and participation in, such a forum.

Acknowledging that meanings attached to heritage elements do not only differ between people from different backgrounds and historical experiences, but also within the same group, ICOM-SA and ICOMOS-SA support comprehensive public participation processes that allow people from diverse backgrounds to meaningfully interact with each other, and heritage practitioners and decision-makers to identify and document landscape characteristics of heritage significance.

Revisiting museum models

Museums are part of a broader cultural landscape. Museums do not have to be confined to buildings, but can form part of a cultural precinct that might incorporate markets, residential areas, eco-museums and natural landscapes, that can be researched, interpreted, conserved and communicated for the benefit of all South Africans. Often, museums are part of heritage precincts that contribute to the civil status and a sense of place. In other cases, a museum may form an information hub for the heritage of a town. This is especially true in rural areas where local museums play a leading role in the conservation and awareness of heritage. These are all ways in which museums are themselves integral elements of cultural landscapes.

ICOM-SA and ICOMOS-SA acknowledge the role of museums as knowledge centres that collect evidence and interpretations of cultural landscapes, including heritage elements, and which conduct research and disseminate knowledge of these cultural landscapes, including features that are no longer visible.

ICOM-SA and ICOMOS-SA acknowledge that museums' activities of collection, research, exhibition and education have been influenced by South Africa's colonial past. Therefore, programmes which explore alternative codification systems, which promote and document the complex linkages between objects in collections and between the collections and cultural landscapes, as well as which problematize gaps in collections, will be actively promoted. Through these endeavours, new and specifically South African models of museum practice and museology can be developed, models

which recognise the significance of the broader cultural landscapes of which museums are a part. ICOM-SA and ICOMOS-SA will initiate and support programmes to explore such new models, bearing in mind that they should not be seen as an attempt to replace, but rather to supplement existing models.

Museums are future- and people-oriented and can play an important role in the transformation of the ways in which we memorialise through providing space for intervention, dialogue and education. ICOM-SA and ICOMOS-SA undertake to engage with their members regarding implementation of interventions to foster such programmes.

ICOM-SA and ICOMOS-SA recognise the cultural roots of anthropogenic climate change; and recognise the present and future impacts of it on South Africa's environment and society, and thus on the nation's cultural landscapes. ICOM-SA and ICOMOS-SA undertake to promote and enact, at every opportunity, the climate change mitigation and adaptation programmes developed by government and other relevant national and international institutions and agencies, and to encourage museums and other heritage institutions to bring climate change issues into their public programmes.

A commitment towards the transformation of the heritage sector

The vandalism of memorials in 2015 stems from public frustration caused by the lack of effective social and economic transformation in South African society, rather than from the simple symbolic significance of memorials. There is a role for heritage and the museum sector to sensitize society to the irreplaceable value of heritage resources and create awareness of how identities and narratives are developed in relation to each other. However, at the same time these acts of vandalism and destruction should be interpreted as an effort to create a new public memory and the heritage and museum sector should rise to the challenge of creating channels of constructive debate and action.

ICOM-SA and ICOMOS-SA undertake to initiate and support programmes to problematize current definitions and codification systems to manage cultural landscapes.

ICOM-SA and ICOMOS-SA undertake to lobby for a critical analysis of the meaning of museums and heritage resources to ensure that heritage strategy is rooted in informed decisions.

ICOM-SA and ICOMOS-SA support a holistic approach towards the transformation of cultural landscapes. Decisions on the future of museums, memorials and public art should consider the relationship between the contested symbol and its location in the past and present and the complex narratives that are present around the contested symbol. Any debate about the future of these symbols must consider not only the needs and views of the present generation but should also respect past generations and furthermore ensure that heritage is conserved in order to allow future generations to have their own debates and make their own decisions. The transformation of heritage symbols should include extensive and inclusive public participation and affirm diversity and inclusivity as protected by the Constitution of South Africa.

Fostering an engaged public

Public awareness and political action are needed to effectively implement national and international commitments related to cultural landscapes. All citizens are responsible for the landscape both as individuals and as part of a community, and this responsibility must therefore be assumed in its entirety, taking into consideration its many and different components and dimensions. It is a responsibility that demands active intervention for its protection, conservation and understanding, within a participatory logic and a sustainable development perspective.

ICOM-SA and ICOMOS-SA encourage museums to actively create channels for public consultation and participation in public policy and decisions on heritage conservation.

ICOM-SA and ICOMOS-SA undertake to advocate for heritage-oriented education in schools in order to develop a citizenry that is informed and skilled and has the confidence to participate in heritage conservation processes. Museums are urged to support heritage education through exhibitions and programmes related to heritage content taught in schools.

Integrating heritage conservation and development

Rather than defining some spaces as special or significant in relation to other spaces, the concept of cultural landscapes views the landscape holistically, -and is a planning and managing tool used to describe elements of a landscape and the cultural value attached to them. It provides a conceptual framework for the heritage sector to contribute to an integrated development plan that takes into account heritage conservation, spatial planning and sustainable social, economic and environmental development.

ICOM-SA and ICOMOS-SA acknowledge that education, addressing poverty, and improving living conditions are core needs of South African society, and undertake to advocate for the inclusion of heritage management in local economic planning and local spatial development planning.

ICOM-SA and ICOMOS-SA undertake to encourage members to contribute to socio-economic development by creating forums for society to participate in decision-making on socio-economic and cultural programme strategies through exhibitions and education.