



SUBJECTIVITY, INTANGIBLE CULTURAL SIGNIFICANCE AND HERITAGE IMPACT ASSESSMENT

INTRODUCTION

- Traditional focus:
 - Tangible heritage & physical condition of heritage sites
 - Significance evaluated on the basis of an objective (?) perception of aesthetic, architectural, visual, economic value
- Disempowering – heritage management is in the hands of conservation professionals
- Global move towards more holistic approach - intangible heritage
- Growing recognition of social quality in the process of conservation - related to social challenges:
 - Loss of social fabric
 - Decrease in neighbourhood vitality
 - Loss of knowledge

1996 REPORT OF THE WORLD COMMISSION ON CULTURE AND DEVELOPMENT

- Definitions are too narrow. They are biased towards the elite, the monumental, the literate and the ceremonial.
- Re-assess conceptions & develop better methods of identifying and interpreting heritage.
- Essential to understand the values and aspirations that drove its makers (without which an object is torn from its context and cannot be given its proper meaning).

NHRA

'LIVING HERITAGE' MEANS THE INTANGIBLE ASPECTS OF INHERITED CULTURE, AND MAY INCLUDE...

- (a) cultural tradition;**
- (b) oral history;**
- (c) performance;**
- (d) ritual;**
- (e) popular memory;**
- (f) skills and techniques;**
- (g) indigenous knowledge systems; and**
- (h) the holistic approach to nature, society and social relationships**

National Estate

- May include **places** to which oral traditions are attached or which are associated with living heritage
- SAHRA must promote the identification and recording of aspects of living heritage associated with heritage resources

VALUE ASSESSMENT

- Conservation is a value driven process
 - But ICH entails shift away from values-based approach
- Value assessment dominated by professional opinion
- Who is included / excluded?
 - Indigenous inhabitants / communities
 - Living heritage sites with community claims of special strong social, spiritual or other cultural association [ICOMOS Australia 1999, article 12]
- Defining communities and communities' associations with heritage sites can be problematic:
 - Putative community / claimed *special association* / historically fake or questionable historic validity

SUBJECTIVITY

- Viewed as shortcoming of impact assessment because of politicised evaluations, value judgments & simplified assumptions
- Wilkins (2003) takes a different approach:
 - subjectivity is a positive attribute of the impact assessment process
 - should be encouraged in order to promote sustainability and confidence in decision-making
 - EIA also provides an essential forum in which the public, proponents and regulators deliberate on the design and implementation of development
- Informed decision-making is not the only goal:
 - Facilitates / creates discourse around the pertinent issues
 - Promotes the development of values that foster greater social responsibility

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT & CONSERVATION

- More than just 'restoration'
- Must encourage a balanced attitude to the relationship between the old and the new
- Implies sustainable use and not merely maintaining the present condition
- Deals simultaneously with preservation & development:
 - Built environment and landscapes have an essential narrative linking the present and the past through: personal memories, stories, traditions, genealogical links and scientific reconstructions of historical events.
 - Knowledge about what happened in a site or building can guide spatial planning through intangible factors.
- Intangible heritage does have a role to play in identifying which aspects of the built environment should be conserved, as well as reconciling conflicting approaches for how to do this



SPATIAL PLANNING

- ICH as a potential force to guide spatial planning by providing it with a historical narrative
- Direct implications for spatial planning but consequences are not immediately apparent
 - because the meanings of heritage have shifted from a narrowly aesthetic / historic to one that includes social components
 - makes it difficult to establish definitive meanings for value and significance

CRITICAL THOUGHTS

- Scope of application: Most of the examples in the literature represent manifestations of intangible heritage that are linked to the identity of a specific community to which the persons concerned belong
- Need to safeguard against social components being used inappropriately to entrench sectarian interests -bearing in mind the cultural significance of living heritage sites, lies in the way of life / social activities associated with traditional communities
- Difficulties in how to measure / manage the social performance
- In order to achieve "integration" & to retain social quality through heritage management practices there is a need for applicable guidelines:
 - to interpret social quality in a measurable way
 - to inform the role that social quality plays through living heritage conservation

INTEGRATION OF SOCIAL CONSIDERATIONS

- Dissonance reflects dissatisfaction within regulated community with the status quo that ignores social costs
- Resultant loss of social / public support for conservation
- Parameters for *what* is integrated and *how*?
 - The issue of what considerations are relevant/irrelevant must be determined in light of the NHRA based on the facts of the case (site and context)
 - NHRA provides a non-exhaustive list of some of the matters that serve as relevant considerations to *living heritage*
 - The purpose of the *power* being exercised under the NHRA is also relevant to determine what factors are relevant

IN PRACTICE

- Living heritage requires an interdisciplinary body of knowledge:
 - techniques for restoration of historical buildings
 - cultural and social awareness of habits, activities and values which are relevant to protect the cultural significance of the site
- Practical implications?
 - Surveys of built environment
 - need to consider the social quality of living heritage, which is the most vulnerable characteristic impacted by development
 - More readily integrated into section 38 HIA
 - Ever expanding scope of section 34 applications is more complicated
 - Original statutory focus and scope – preservation of built fabric
 - Indirectly influencing spatial development through conditions of development through demolition of built fabric