

The Safeguarding of Tangible and Intangible Cultural Heritage: Towards an Integrated Approach

Nara, Japan, 20-23 October 2004

Dear Members and Friends,

I have recently returned home from Japan, where I had the privilege of attending this meeting, convened to mark the 10th anniversary of the Nara Document on Authenticity, and the 40th anniversary of the Venice Charter - and held in light of the adoption by UNESCO of the International Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage in 2003.

The meeting was organised by the Japanese Agency for Cultural Affairs (Bunka-cho), ACCU (the Asia-Pacific Cultural Centre for UNESCO), the Nara Prefecture and Nara City, and the UNESCO Division of Cultural Heritage.

The participants included approximately 40 experts in 'tangible heritage' and 'intangible heritage'. The meeting involved the important - although not always easy - exchange between these two groups of experts.

The intangible heritage participants included people from a range of disciplines (anthropology, ethnomusicology, literature, oral tradition, the performing arts, linguistics), experienced in the identification, documentation and safeguarding of cultural processes and practices; including through programs such as UNESCO's *Masterpieces of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity*, and the *Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity* that will be created by the operation of the 2003 Convention.

The tangible heritage participants also included people from a range of disciplines (architecture, archaeology, geography, history), experienced in the identification, values assessment and conservation of heritage places and cultural landscapes, including World Heritage (through the operation of the 1972 World Heritage Convention).

It is expected that the 2003 Intangible Heritage Convention will come into force quite soon, and there is much interest in the question of how these two Conventions for cultural heritage will relate to each other. It is within this context that the Nara meeting occurred.

The meeting was opened by Koichiro Matsuura, Director-General of UNESCO. The keynote speakers were Dinu Bumbaru (ICOMOS Secretary-General), Watanabe Akiyoshi (Japanese Agency for Cultural Affairs), and Cherif Khaznadar (Maison des Cultures du Monde, France).

The Australian participants were Professor William Logan (Cultural Heritage Centre for Asia and the Pacific, Deakin University, Melbourne) and myself. Bill Logan made

a presentation in the 'case studies' session about Australia and the Pacific, which provoked a good deal of discussion.

Maria Cecilia Londres Fonseca outlined the system in place in Brazil for listing of tangible and intangible heritage – an outcome of changes to the Brazilian constitution. Four 'books' have been created – the Book of Knowledge (for traditions of everyday life), the Book of Celebrations, the Book of Forms of Expression (such as music, literature), and the Book of Places.

Other presentations which shaped the discussion were given by Ueki Yukinobu (Japan), Jean-Aime Rakotoarisoa (Madagascar), Tamas Fejerdy (Hungary) and Simadri Ota (India). Speakers were: Ueki Yukinobu (Japan), Jean-Aime Rakotoarisoa (Madagascar), Tamas Fejerdy (Hungary) and Simadri Ota (India). Riëks Smeets, Chief of UNESCO's Intangible Heritage Section presented an overview of the 'Masterpieces' program.

It was clear throughout the meeting that there are a number of perceptions across the tangible/intangible heritage 'divide' which require much more exchange of this kind.

As a group, we struggled at times to find an appropriate and commonly understood language to support the conversation. For example, the term 'authenticity', as it is used in relation to the conservation of the tangible and intangible values of heritage places, is considered to be inappropriate for the consideration of intangible cultural heritage. Similarly, for intangible heritage, the term 'safeguarding' is preferred to notions of 'conservation'.

There was questioning throughout the discussion about the need for 'integrated approaches' to intangible and tangible cultural heritage – and in what circumstances these might be usefully applied. In opening the conference, UNESCO Director-General Matsuura referred to the situations where tangible and intangible heritage are intertwined – in recognition of the associative values of World Heritage places and landscapes, and in the notion of 'cultural space' in the 2003 Convention. He acknowledged that while tangible and intangible cultural heritage necessarily require different safeguarding activities, these need to be mutually supportive, with some reconciliation of terms and consistency in policies.

Toward the end of the meeting, a more animated and genuine dialogue started to emerge – in both the formal and informal conversations within the group. This illustrates both the importance of this initial encounter, and also the necessity for it to continue.

Our Japanese hosts treated the participants to some wonderful experiences of the cultural heritage of Nara City and the region. I am sure that all participants returned home with enduring memories of Nara's famous Todai-ji temple, the Kii Mountains and Kinpusen-ji temple, and the Kasuga-taisha Shrine - all places recognised already through inclusion in the World Heritage List, and inextricably linked to significant aspects of Japan's intangible heritage.

The meeting adopted a declaration at the close of the meeting – the ***Yamato Declaration on Integrated Approaches for Safeguarding Tangible and Intangible Cultural Heritage***.* I encourage all Australia ICOMOS members to have a look at it

– either from the UNESCO website: <http://portal.unesco.org/culture/>, or from the Australia ICOMOS website: www.icomos.org/australia (look in the 'news' section).

Although the Declaration wasn't able to incorporate all the discussion which occurred in the final sessions of the meeting, it is an important milestone in what in time will become a better articulated dialogue.

The Declaration is indicative of the currents shaping international thinking about cultural heritage. In its limited success in defining what an 'integration' of approaches to tangible and intangible heritage might entail, it also illustrates the importance and also the difficulties of the discussion held in Nara – a discussion that has just begun, and must continue - including here in Australia.

For me, the meeting challenged many accepted ways in which we think and speak about what we do. I am grateful to the organisers and to all the participants for the very rich experience.

Our sincere thanks are due to the Japanese authorities for hosting once again a meeting to address complex cultural heritage issues, and to the professional staff of UNESCO's Cultural Heritage Division (and the World Heritage Centre) for their valuable contributions.

In the meantime, further discussion of these matters with colleagues closer to home is very welcome. The Australia ICOMOS Executive Committee has identified the further exploration of intangible heritage and the implications of the new convention for our practice as a priority area for our program in the coming year – all interested members are invited to participate.

Best regards,

Kristal Buckley, M.ICOMOS
President, Australia ICOMOS

* Yamato is an ancient name for the Nara region.