IN THIS SPECIAL EDITION SYDNEY/RIYAD 2023

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In this issue, we have chosen to take a look back at the ICOMOS General Assembly, held in Sydney (Australia) from 31 August to 9 September 2023, and the World Heritage Committee, held in Riyadh (Kingdom of Saudi Arabia) from 10 to 25 September 2023. These two events marked the month of September, and were major encounters for the world of heritage.

It was the 21st session of the ICOMOS General Assembly, originally scheduled for 2020 and cancelled due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The event brought together 1300 participants from all over the world, representing over 100 National Committees and 31 Scientific Committees, under the theme "Heritage and Change". Africa was also represented, with around twenty of us present. The Assembly was also marked by the election to the Board of two African members, whom we warmly congratulate: Chilangwa Chaiwa, from Zambia, who succeeds Alpha Diop as ICOMOS Vice-President representing Africa; and Olufemi Adetunji from Nigeria, former coordinator of the ICOMOS Emerging Professionals Working Group for the Africa Region. This event was a real opportunity for us, as emerging professionals, to understand a little more about how ICOMOS works, but also and above all to meet each other and expand our respective networks.

As for the World Heritage Committee, this was its 45th enlarged session, as the session originally scheduled for 2022 in Kazan (Russia) could not take place due to the Russian-Ukrainian conflict. Among the 21 members of the Committee at this session, it is important to note that a third were African: South Africa, Egypt, Ethiopia, Mali, Nigeria, Rwanda and Zambia. The event also marked a new milestone in the protection and promotion of African world heritage, with 6 new inscriptions of sites from the African continent:

- Djerba: Testimony to a settlement pattern of an island territory (Tunisia);
- Memorial sites of the Genocide: Nyamata, Murambi, Gisozi and Bisesero (Rwanda);
- The Gedeo Cultural Landscape (Ethiopia);
- Bale Mountains National Park (Ethiopia);
- Forest Massif of Odzala-Kokoua (Congo); &
- Nyugwe National Park (Rwanda);

Added to this is the removal of the Tombs of Buganda Kings at Kasubi (Uganda) from the List of World Heritage in Danger, and the extension of Koutammakou, the Land of the Batammariba from Togo to Benin.

The future therefore looks bright for African heritage, and we're delighted to be able to contribute to it.

Enjoy your reading!
1. From Bamako to Tunis, who is Hamet Diop?
Mr Hamet Alpha DIOP is a Malian architect working in the ALDI Bioclimatics Designs architectural studio (Bamako MALI). A former student at Ibn Khaldoun University in Tunis who graduated in June 2016, he has been passionate about architectural heritage ever since university, hence his final dissertation entitled "Musée ethnologique du Mali" (Ethnological Museum of Mali), which was based on architectural, sociological, cultural and cultic research into all the ethnic groups of Mali. Concerned about the future of Mali's rich heritage, he decided to gather information and join the various organizations and structures that could guide, train and help him in his quest. He is a member of ICOMOS-MALI and a UNESCO consultant. Since 2018, he has been President of the Association of Young Architects of Mali.

2. What is the state of cultural heritage in Mali today?
Mali has been experiencing a multi-polar crisis for a number of years, which has had major negative impacts on cultural heritage, one of the most striking examples being the ancient cities of Djenné (the deterioration of the architecture of the listed old town led to its inclusion on the List of World Heritage in Danger in 2016, at the 40th session of the World Heritage Committee in Istanbul). The major impact of these various crises has been the deterioration of certain sites, the lack of adequate funding for the upgrading and restoration of monuments and sites, the lack of tourism (one of the greatest resources for the local population in particular and the country in general), the rural exodus, etc. However, the government of Mali, the local population, professionals in the field (architects, archaeologists, historians, etc.) and international organizations (ICOMOS, UNESCO, etc.) are fighting to ensure the survival of cultural heritage and perpetuate knowledge and know-how, notably by organizing awareness-raising campaigns, training sessions and working sessions with the various government services.

3. You were at the New Delhi ICOMOS General Assembly (GA) in 2017 where the Emerging Professionals Working Group (EPWG) was created and at the Sydney GA in 2023. From your point of view, what was the contribution of Africa in this working group and what should we do to strengthen the presence of African Emerging Professionals (EPs) in ICOMOS working groups?
At the New Delhi GA in 2017, the creation of the EPWG was one of the innovative ideas and one of the highlights was to assign each young person to a mentor for advice and guidance. The presence of Africa in this working group enabled the group firstly to make itself known, in the sense that the representation of Africa was not significant, and secondly to share knowledge in a general way through activity reports, the creation of several committees (many young members) and webinars, among other things. As a result, Africa is making more contributions to achieving the various objectives. In order to strengthen the presence of the African EPs in the ICOMOS working groups, awareness campaigns should be organized to ensure a better (intellectual) contribution.

4. As an architect, you have had to work with Malian local communities to rebuild their heritage. Tell us an anecdote from one of your missions that illustrates the importance of young people in the management of heritage sites in Africa.
In 2020, during a UNESCO mission to Djenné entitled "Projet de Sauvegarde et de mise en valeur du Patrimoine culturel du Mali", I organized a meeting whose theme was: "The role of UNESCO, the State and the population; raising awareness, general information about the mission and the work, current problems relating to cultural heritage and various other issues."
During this meeting, an old mason stressed the following: "It is really necessary to organize periodic training courses for masons, especially young masons, in order to ensure the perpetuity of knowledge and know-how. Unfortunately, the majority of young people want to go to the big cities and are losing more and more interest in earth construction to the detriment of cement construction, but tell them that we will all end up under the same earth as our ancestors, and therefore we are forever linked to the earth".

5. Your message to African Emerging Professionals?
There's a good dynamic at African EPs level, so let's continue to raise awareness around us. The creation of the network was the first step towards the top of the pyramid. We have a long way to go, but let's be united in truth, perseverance and courage, while having precise objectives that we will defend and seek to achieve. It would be important for the African EPs to take part in the various missions and investigations throughout the continent in particular and the world in general.
In conjunction with the GA 2023, which was held in Sydney in September, a three-day youth forum was organized on Cockatoo Island, one of the old World Heritage convict site. From Friday 1 to Sunday 3 September 2023, an enriching cultural camp on the theme of "heritage changes" lit up Cockatoo Island thanks to the support of the Sydney harbor federation trust.

The forum welcomed young heritage professionals from around the world to share their knowledge and experience, discuss current heritage issues, showcase innovative practices and suggest alternatives for the common heritage. Beyond the usual programmes and activities, the event was a combination of responsive, dynamic and explanatory workshops, plenary sessions, group exercises and sessions across the site.

The event got off to a good start with the presentation of the Cockatoo Island Master Plan, followed by a breakdown of participants into three themes. To encourage a competitive spirit, an ideas competition aiming at generating proposals to enrich and strengthen the Cockatoo Island Master Plan was announced. To this end, participants were divided into 16 groups, working on a range of issues relating to Cockatoo Island, with the aim of selecting, at the end of the event, a group to win the prize for the best proposal.

The 2023 Youth Forum addressed the overall theme through three strands: Stain, Grain and Reframe. Each strand was linked to the themes and programmes of the AG 2023 scientific symposium, although they all included sessions and programmes on indigenous heritage, climate change, with a particular focus on sustainable development. This enabled participants to approach the themes through a wide variety of interpretations, allowing the programme content and learning to be diverse and inclusive.
The Stain theme linked to the themes “Resilience, Rights, Heritage and Sustainability” of GA 2023, addressed the issue of “How are places marked by the past and shaped by contemporary heritage practices?” where young heritage practitioners explored how to recognise traces of the past in contemporary practices and approaches, issues relating to indigenous and first nations heritage, colonialism and multicultural heritage. They have also learned to consider minority communities and the need to recognise the difficult histories and contested places that make up the different layers of heritage.

The Grain theme, part of the GA 2023's “Responsibility, Resilience, Culture and Nature” themes, tackled the question of how to go ‘against the grain’ of complacency about climate change, and other major global trends, given the changing world. In other words, grains explored how heritage practice can adapt to an era of more frequent and severe weather events, pandemics and other transformational global trends. In addition, they learned how, by taking responsibility, they can build resilience to ensure the conservation and enhancement of their collective heritage for future generations.

The third Reframe theme was related to the GA 2023 theme “Relationships and Digital Heritage”. It dealt with the question of how young people and new professionals can "reframe" heritage. And by ‘reframing’ conservation ideas, values and practices, how can we prepare the ground for an uncertain future? Reframe invited us to explore the relationship between heritage practice and new technologies, diverse perspectives and inclusive frameworks. It encouraged new and varied voices and experiences and considered how best to integrate new technologies and perspectives into conservation practice.

The closing session focused on the presentation of the ideas competition proposals by the young participants on the future of Cockatoo Island to representatives of the Sydney Harbor Federation Trust. It was with great pride that our group, which dealt with the issues of digital integration and new technologies in the development of Cockatoo Island, won the first prize. What better reward than the tempting offer to climb the iconic Sydney Harbour Bridge!

In conclusion, this forum was not only an enriching camp for the exchange of experiences, culture and ideas on the challenges facing our heritage today, but it was also a great adventure to spend the entire stay sleeping in tents in the middle of nature in a World Heritage site rich in history. Surrounded by running water, fresh air, campfires, galas and barbecue parties. Although we're parting ways today, the adventure is far from over. It will continue thanks to the passion of these young enthusiasts in a world that knows no borders.
1. From Zanzibar to Paris, who is Muhammad Juma Muhammad?

This is a very interesting question, and I am unsure if I will be honest enough to observe myself objectively. However, I am pretty sure that, between Zanzibar and Paris, one should add two names: a city, Tokyo, and a town, Cape Town. I am a Zanzibari and have all the complexity of people born on Islands: cosmopolitan with multiple identities and tolerance. Being an Islander is also a privilege of being aware, at a very early stage of life, of the world’s vulnerability and scarcity of resources.

Zanzibar gave me the basis of who I am today. I am color and racial blind, like many Zanzibaris of my generation. Things are changing, though: pity. I was born in Zanzibar in a period when the legacy of the 1964 Revolution was alive: equity and social justice are fundamental values to me.

I was formed in Paris after a period of architectural studies in Turkey. I like the time I spent in Paris. As a young planner, there was no better place to observe the importance of social, economic, and spatial interaction than Paris. Yet, Tokyo elevated me. In Tokyo, I understood the beauty of urban space, the difference between density and crowd, and the importance of aesthetics in urban design. But in Cape Town, I experienced personal growth in my inner soul. This lovely and mystical town gave me challenges to grasp it. Today, I am all the above, but most importantly, a happy man.

2. What are your daily tasks and objectives as Chief of the Africa Unit at the UNESCO World Heritage Centre?

As you know, I am part of the Secretariat of the 1972 Convention, specifically dealing with sub-Saharan Africa. My daily tasks are divided into three categories: (i) To ensure that I fulfill my role in implementing UNESCO’s mandate requested by the Member States or envisaged by the Director General (DG) of UNESCO to respond to Global issues, such as Climate change; (ii) As secretariat to the 1972 Convention, I am following up on the World Heritage Committee decisions in my region and support African States Parties in implementing them; finally, (iii) I am leading a dedicated team with whom I develop innovative projects and initiatives with partners (AWHF, ICOMOS, ICCROM and IUCN) to support African States Parties in harnessing culture and heritage in its social and economic transformation in the frameworks of the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals or the 2063 Vision, ‘the Africa We Want’.

3. During the 45th session of the World Heritage Committee, held from 10 to 25 September in Riyadh (Kingdom of Saudi Arabia), the Committee adopted Decision 45 COM 5C, endorsing the Strategy for World Heritage in Africa. Can you tell us more about this strategy?

The Strategy is a new framework envisioned by the DG of UNESCO and led by Assistant Director General (ADG)-Cultural Sector to effectively implement Flagship Programme 3 of Priority Africa and its Strategic Operation 2022-2029.

In fact, UNESCO established the Priority Africa Programme in 1989 to support African Member States in “leveraging the central role of culture at the heart of development issues...”. In November 2021, at its 41st Session, the UNESCO General Conference adopted a new Operational Strategy for Priority Africa 2022-2029, of which the Flagship Programme 3 intends to “Foster Cultural Heritage and Capacity development”. The Strategy proposes a vision and priorities. It unpacks the objectives of Flagship Programme 3, including increasing the representativity of Africa, supporting the removal of African sites from the World Heritage List in Danger and upscaling the roster of African experts working for the 1972 Convention.
4. Out of the 42 sites newly inscribed on the World Heritage List during this last Committee, 5 were African. What does this say about the future of World Heritage for Africa?

Increasing the representativity of Africa on the World Heritage List is precisely one of the objectives of Flagship Programme 3 of Priority Africa. Indeed, this is already a target of the 1994 Global Strategy. The success of the nomination of the African site and the removal of Tombs of Buganda Kings at Kasubi (Uganda) from the World Heritage List in Danger shows that our strategy is starting to deliver its fruits.

5. What is your message to African youth?

I would advise them to follow up on the activities of the World Heritage Centre and its partners regarding implementing the 1972 Convention in Africa. We have many activities that target youth, such as a mentorship programme and African Youth Forum. Through this published newsletter, I would also encourage them to share with us their ideas or forward their feedback.
PHOTO ALBUM OF AFRICAN PARTICIPANTS AT THE ICOMOS 2023 GENERAL ASSEMBLY
In September 2023, I was delighted to be part of the World Heritage Young Professionals Forum organized in Saudi Arabia by the UNESCO World Heritage Education Programme, the Ministry of Culture in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Saudi Heritage Commission and Diadrasis. The Forum, under the theme “Looking Ahead: The Next 50 Years of Protecting Natural and Cultural Heritage” was an integral part of the extended 45th session of the World Heritage Committee.

Outstanding to my experience was the hospitality of the Saudi people and the visits to some of the World Heritage sites in Saudi Arabia. The Al Ahsa Oasis, for example, is a well maintained large site which demonstrates a clear respect and value for heritage, with committed care through investment in safeguarding the palm trees, a source of identity of the Saudi in the area.

The Forum consisted of 33 young professionals from 34 different countries in the world and heritage experts, all presenting different professional backgrounds, diverse cultures and different perspectives to heritage promotion. From a Tunisian colleague for example, I learnt that young people are using digital tools (virtual tours) to access heritage sites in their schools. In Uganda, the Heritage Education Programme runs more than 170 heritage clubs in secondary schools; digital tools have not been explored yet. Young people constantly want to visit heritage sites and museums but due to limited time at school and resources, these visits are barely achieved. I am exploring virtual technologies with the Cross-Cultural Foundation of Uganda to provide more access to heritage by young people so that appreciation, respect and care for heritage is improved.

Climate change was at the center of the Forum’s discussion. I am working on the Net Zero: Heritage For Climate Action project (supported by ICCROM) at the Ekishalhala Kya Kororo Sacred Site in the Rwenzori Mountains National Park. Many sites in the area have been affected by climate change and limited efforts by stakeholders are there to harness indigenous knowledge to restore such sites. This call was made in the joint Declaration that was produced as part of the Forum and read during the World Heritage Committee sitting. Hopefully leaders will ensure the value of indigenous knowledge systems in climate mitigation is explored and incorporated in climate action.

During the World Heritage Committee, I met the Prime Minister (Katikiro) of Buganda Kingdom (the managers of the Tombs of Buganda Kings at Kasubi, a World Heritage Site). He expressed his willingness to also have young professionals dedicated to the site and generally protecting heritage in the Kingdom; this could take a form of the World Heritage Volunteers. This interest will be explored.

My experience was an enriching one to my professional career and will influence my community work. I hope UNESCO and other heritage focused institutions will continue providing such platforms to young professionals to foster cross-learning, sharing challenges and co-creating solutions for heritage management in different contexts.

Aliguma Ahabyona Akiiki (Uganda)
As an integral part of the extended 45th session of the World Heritage Committee, and in the framework of the UNESCO World Heritage Education Programme, the Ministry of Culture in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia through the National Committee for Education, Culture and Science and the Saudi Heritage Commission hosted the World Heritage Young Professionals Forum 2023 under the theme of “Looking Ahead: The Next 50 Years of Protecting Natural and Cultural Heritage” from 3 to 12 September 2023 in Riyadh and the Al-Ahsa Oasis.

I was fortunate enough to be one of the 36 participants from 34 countries representing the five geographic zones. We spent 10 days immersed in intensive discussions and experience sharing to deduce a declaration to better protect our shared heritage globally. Our discussion encompassed combating the effects of climate change, best practices for sustainable tourism, and moving towards the digital era.

I am an early career professional pursuing the field of cultural heritage preservation in Ethiopia. I am always excited for opportunities to advance my overall professional skill to its extensive potential. This 2023 World Heritage Young Professionals Forum was groundbreaking and technically informative in clarifying our role as the next generation of professionals for the protection of World Heritage.

The entire forum’s thematic area greatly interested and engaged me. At the same time for the purpose of this reflection I will focus on sustainable tourism, which is to me the most inspirational part of our declaration. Besides highlighting the importance of continued study of possible impact of sustainable tourism we advocated for the protection of intangible heritage, as African World Heritage sites embody intangible heritage.

Sustainable tourism is a relatively new concept globally, while unidentified future impacts can be a greater threat. As Sustainability is a multidimensional concept, monitoring and documentation of the effects of ‘sustainable tourism’ will contribute to make well informed future plans, decisions and policies.

Through this declaration, it is my hope that States Parties’ support for past, present and future impact assessment of ‘sustainable tourism’ is guaranteed. While promoting best practices, the continued impact assessment will directly contribute to track, identify and reverse possible negative impacts of current approaches.

We had numerous sessions focusing on sustainable tourism and discussed current best practices from around the world. At the same time I strongly believe we must continue to question ourselves ‘What is the truest form of sustainable tourism?’ or ‘Is it one size fits all?’, better yet ‘Do we have enough research and information to conclude current sustainable tourism approaches are actually sustainable?’ These ideas were clearly articulated in our declaration, in totality we urged States Parties to invest in continuous study and documentation of the effects of ‘sustainable tourism’ since we have not yet quite fully grasped the effects of sustainable tourism practices.

Besides our declaration, I believe the intercultural learning and exchange with young people, educators, and heritage experts from different parts of the world have transformed my professional consciousness. It has been highly beneficial for my career to be immersed in this program. As I reflect on this experience, I look forward to observing the impact of the 2023 World Heritage Young professionals’ forum declaration unfold and to be part of the effort to pave the way for the next generation of heritage professionals.

Looking ahead to the next 50 years, it is my aspiration to learn from past experiences in regards to contextualizing global ideas to the African continent and discover the truest form of sustainable tourism and shield our intangible heritage as it is the backbone of African World Heritage.

Finally I leave you with the question: “How can we find the balance within sharing our heritage through tourism, revenue generation and intangible heritage protection?” While I am optimistic, only time along with sustained and neutral monitoring will provide us with tangible answers.

Hewan Goitom Berhane (Ethiopie)
I am an Architect and an Academician. I teach heritage conservation at KNUST, Kumasi-Ghana. I became interested in heritage conservation after I observed how the loss of important heritage items was rendering most of Ghana’s legendary and historical stories unbelievable. And so, I developed the career goals of helping to preserve Ghana’s heritage items; helping to migrate more of Ghana’s heritage onto the World Heritage list; and helping to train more heritage professionals. In order to build my capacity to take on these tasks, I was motivated to apply for this year’s World Heritage Young Professionals Forum which took place in Riyadh- Saudi Arabia from the 3rd to 12th September, 2023.

Indeed, the forum was very educational. I got the opportunity to meet and interact with 33 fellow participants who came from all over the world. These participants had diverse experiences and knowledge in heritage conservation. Hence the forum afforded us the opportunity to share ideas, to learn from each other and to build friendships and professional networks. The forum also enabled us to learn from experienced resource persons who lectured us in four thematic areas: climate change, sustainable tourism, diversity and the digital dimensions of World Heritage. We also simulated the proceedings of the World Heritage Committee and attended one of its meetings. These were very informative and they come at a very critical point to inform my professional decisions.

The forum also afforded me the opportunity to learn about the cultures of the fellow participants and the host country. Indeed, this was the first time I met and interacted with people from Somalia and Papua New Guinea. The similarities and differences in cultures were amazing. An intercultural dinner was organized, which enabled us to taste cuisines from different countries. It was also the first time I got to experience Saudi Arabia. One thing that struck me the most was Saudi’s hospitality and gala dinners. We were literally treated as kings, we got to stay in some of the top-notch hotels and the amount of delicious food was endless. I also experienced and learnt from some of Saudi’s World Heritage sites.

The organization was on point and I must commend the team from Diadrasis and UNESCO who made it all possible through their hard work and dedication. I learnt so much from the forum and at this point, I believe my professional capacity has been enhanced and I am ready to take on my career goals.

Emmanuel Banahene Owusu (Ghana)
Axum was an ancient civilization that flourished between the 1st and 6th centuries AD in Africa. The Axum Empire, located in what is now modern-day Ethiopia and Eritrea, was an important trading and naval power in the region. The significance of this civilization goes beyond its economic prowess to include its cultural and religious contributions.

Its strategic geographic location was one of the major features of the Axum Empire. As a gateway between the Red Sea and the Mediterranean Sea, the empire served as a trading hub between continents. This made Axum a significant center for global trade, with links to Egypt, Arabia, Persia, India, and even Greece and Rome. They traded a diverse range of commodities, including ivory, gold, spices, precious stones, and various agricultural products. Their skilled merchants and extensive trading network allowed Axum to accumulate immense wealth, resulting in the development of advanced urban centers and infrastructure.

The empire's architectural marvels are a testament to its advanced engineering and architectural skills. These structures included towering obelisks, grand palaces, and intricate churches, which showcased the empire's creativity and ingenuity. In 1980, these architectural masterpieces were recognized as a UNESCO World Heritage site. The largest standing obelisk, measuring over 23 meters, is a remarkable example of the empire's architectural prowess. However, the largest obelisk ever built, which stood over 33 meters tall, now lies in broken fragments where it fell. These towering obelisks, crafted by human hands, are a testament to the incredible feats of engineering and architecture achieved by African civilizations.

Initially, the Axumites worshiped various gods and goddesses. However, around the 4th century AD, the empire became one of the first regions to adopt Christianity as its official religion. This conversion was significant and influenced the development of Ethiopian Orthodox Christianity, which remains an integral part of Ethiopian culture to this day.

The decline of the Axum Empire can be attributed to a combination of factors, including political instability, economic shifts, and invasions by external forces. As early as the 6th century, the empire's power started to decline, ultimately leading to its fall into obscurity. Nevertheless, the Axum Empire's legacy continues to be remembered and revered, especially its advanced governance, economic prosperity, architecture, religious transformations, and cultural influence, which showcase the remarkable achievements of this ancient African empire. The Axum Empire's contributions have left an indelible mark on Africa's historical narrative, serving as a reminder of the continent's rich history and cultural heritage.
LATEST OPPORTUNITIES

- **Head of Communications and Public Relations (F/M/X) at the International Council of Museums.** More information: [https://lnkd.in/egBeFscW](https://lnkd.in/egBeFscW). Deadline: 10 November 2023.


- **The call for applications for the 2024 #MOPGA fellowship program is open.** A minimum of 40 grants will be awarded to international, early career researchers working on topics related to climate change and environment. To know more: [https://www.campusfrance.org/fr/mopga-2024](https://www.campusfrance.org/fr/mopga-2024). Deadline: 9 Janvier 2024

MASTHEAD

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