Editorial
Culture: Conserving it together

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together with Elizabeth Edwards
Welcome to the first of two volumes of *Historic Environment* arising out of the ICOMOS conference ‘Culture: Conserving it Together’ held in Suva Fiji from 1 to 5 October 2018. The Fiji conference was the first annual conference of Australia ICOMOS held jointly with another national ICOMOS committee – ICOMOS Pasifika.

The ‘Culture’ conference brought together approximately 100 eminent heritage conservation experts from 14 countries including Australia, China, Fiji, France, Japan, Mexico, Myanmar, New Caledonia, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, The Philippines, Taiwan, Tuvalu, United States and Vanuatu. The delegates were joined at this landmark event by several Board members of International ICOMOS including President Toshiyuki Kono, Secretary General Peter Phillips, and Presidents of several Asia-Pacific region ICOMOS National Committees.

The spirit and diversity of the conference papers meant that the selection of papers for publication in these two volumes of *Historic Environment* was a challenge. However, many of the full papers received and not published will, with the authors’ permission, be accessible on the Australia ICOMOS Conference website.

This first volume comprises selected papers around the conference themes ‘Heritage at Risk’ and ‘Underwater Heritage’. The subsequent volume will comprise papers that address the theme ‘Cultural Landscapes and Intangible Heritage’. Of course these themes are deeply inter-related, and particularly so in the face of climate change. As Viduka explains in his excellent paper in this volume, ‘the impact of climate change is yet to unfold in its entirety. Already, traditional owner groups in the north east Pacific are reporting an impact on their customs and traditions, because fish have moved from their breeding grounds northward into the cooler waters of another tribe’ (citing Newland et al. 2017, pp.115-125). Changing weather has also negatively affected Japanese traditional holiday dates associated with cultural traditions of watching the cherry blossoms and autumnal colour (Viduka 2018 citing Brimblecombe & Hayashi 2017, pp.175-185).

Who of us is not in awe of, and in love with, the mighty Pacific? The richness of evolving human culture with which we interact along its shores and across its seas is reflected in the heritage of its peoples. We rarely think of Australia as a Pacific nation, yet some 70% of our population currently lives on the eastern Pacific Coast (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2019). Of course, before colonisation many of Australia’s First Peoples had for thousands of years relied on the abundant resources of Australia’s coastal fringe and the relatively benign climate found there. The European colonisers similarly hugged the coast that provided their transport and communication fresh water, timber, minerals, grazing land and later tourism. This pattern is consistent with the history of land use of our Pacific neighbours. For them a coastal focus is at the heart of their culture and also enabled communication with neighbouring cultures as well as subsequent exploitative colonisation.
Today, all communities that live on a sea coast face the realities of increasing populations, climate change, rising sea levels, unsustainable agricultural practices, resource extraction and tourism. These pressures threaten both tangible cultural heritage and traditional practices and beliefs as much as economic security, the natural environment and living standards.

The challenge for Pacific related cultures is, firstly, to understand that heritage by studying its development over time and its currently evolving manifestations, and secondly by appreciating threats and opportunities, and finally by advancing sustainable management practices. The ‘Culture – Conserving it Together’ conference was an opportunity for participants to consider current topics surrounding this challenge from many different cultural perspectives, and to consider how we can learn from different heritage management processes and practices, both traditional and innovative. We also examined how we can continue to collaborate to protect, monitor and promote the Pacific cultures that we value and respect.

It is opportune that the fifth objective of the Australian Government’s Heritage Strategy 2015-2020 is to work with Southeast Asian and Pacific region States to better protect our shared heritage. Australia ICOMOS was honoured to contribute to this strategic outcome with the support of our Pacific neighbours. The ‘Culture: Conserving it Together’ Conference was an important opportunity to progress this objective, as well as an important precursor to the ICOMOS General Assembly (GA) to be held in Sydney, Australia, in October 2020, which has the theme ‘shared cultures, shared heritage, shared responsibility’.

The conference also provided an opportunity to draft the foundation principles of a Pasifika ICOMOS Charter, which is another project that is supported by Australia ICOMOS and is currently being progressed with the aim to present the draft Charter at the 2020 GA in Sydney.

We hope you enjoy reading the two volumes of conference papers from the 2018 ‘Culture: Conserving it Together’ conference.

References

Australian Bureau of Statistics, Demographic Statistics, March 2019
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Commonwealth of Australia 2015, Australian Heritage Strategy, p. 31

