REPORT: ICOMOS Emerging Professionals: carrying our heritage into the future

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Abstract

At the 2017 ICOMOS General Assembly in Delhi, India, the Emerging Professionals Working Group (EPWG) brought forward a number of promising changes for ICOMOS Emerging Professionals. This group consists of individuals that have recently graduated or are in the beginning of their careers in cultural heritage. As a group, they are not only a powerful resource for their command of social media and new technologies but are also a source of innovation and perspective. This paper discusses my experience as an Emerging Professional at the 2017 ICOMOS General Assembly as well as the Resolutions brought about as a result of the hard-work of the EPWG. I will argue that this group is driving cultural heritage practices into the future and encouraging a more inclusive ICOMOS.

Introduction

The 2017 ICOMOS General Assembly in Delhi, India, was promising for the future of the ICOMOS Emerging Professionals – those people in the early beginning of their careers in cultural heritage. The Emerging Professionals was a hot topic of discussion at the Assembly, especially how these people can be better included into the organisation and what they bring to the table now and in the future. There was a small but visible cohort of Emerging Professionals in attendance at the ICOMOS GA, coming from countries such as Australia, Germany, Canada, India and the United States (Figure 1). All these individuals sought to be included and to have a voice within the proceedings of the Assembly. There were many achievements for these young and emerging professionals including the rise of one of the youngest candidates to the board of ICOMOS, Clara Rellensmann (Germany).

This article looks into the significance of the 19th ICOMOS General Assembly for the Emerging Professionals and what the future looks like for a more inclusive ICOMOS.
What is an ICOMOS emerging professional?

Before delving into the progress made for the ICOMOS Emerging Professionals at the 2017 ICOMOS GA in Delhi, it should be understood what it means to be an Emerging Professional. The Australia ICOMOS website recognises its Emerging/Young/Early Career Professionals as anyone under 30 years of age with a career or interest in cultural heritage (Australia ICOMOS 2018). It is suitable for those who do not meet the requirements or are not yet eligible for full membership of ICOMOS but are interested in becoming involved in the organisation. There are a number of benefits of being a part of this group, particularly in Australia, such as access and eligibility to apply for the US ICOMOS Summer Internship Program and access to the Young/Early Career Professionals Mentoring Program. This is an excellent way for individuals to kickstart their careers in cultural heritage and provides a way to interact and gain advice from professionals with years of experience in this field.

One of the most significant changes to this group at the most recent ICOMOS General Assembly in Delhi was amending the name from ‘Young Professionals’ to ‘Emerging Professionals’. This is important as many people make a shift to a career in cultural heritage later in life. This provides room for these people to have a role in the ‘Emerging Professionals Working Group’ (EPWG) and reflects the diversity of people beginning their careers in cultural heritage.

The rise of the emerging professional in Delhi

The 19th ICOMOS General Assembly was undoubtedly the year of the Emerging Professionals. The idea of creating a more ‘inclusive’ ICOMOS was a key theme that was echoed throughout the entirety of the Assembly and the Scientific Symposium, championed by the Emerging Professionals Working Group. Although these Emerging Professionals were a minority at the Assembly, their voices and ideas were heard by all, accepting the need for change, recognition and guidance. This is a turning point for students and graduates like myself, starting their career in heritage but finding it immensely challenging to enter into the heritage industry, particularly with so many highly renowned academics and well-qualified professionals. What was wonderful about Delhi, was that Emerging Professionals and academics alike provided support for each other and strived to create an environment in which all were welcome, and all ideas were given value. The Emerging Professionals were given a voice at this General Assembly and it was clear from the repetition of words such as ‘youth’, ‘technology’ and ‘inclusion’ that ICOMOS was ready to better accommodate these individuals. Overall, it was a win for the EPWG, with the youngest candidate, Clara Rellensmann of Germany being elected to the ICOMOS Board. She recognised that ‘this is a time for change,’ and reiterated the need to increase the inclusion of Emerging Professionals in the future. Rellensmann will be on the ICOMOS board until 2020 and it will be a pleasure to see her progress and to see how she can make ICOMOS more inclusive for professionals in the early stages of their careers in cultural heritage.

The Emerging Professionals were particularly visible in the social media coverage of the Culture-Nature Journey of the Scientific Symposium. This initiative was coordinated jointly by ICOMOS and IUCN and sought to bridge the divide between the practice of cultural heritage and natural heritage. Emerging Professionals like myself took to creating an online presence for this Culture-Nature Journey by posting photos and providing updates on social media about the progress of the ‘Journey’. The ability of Emerging Professionals to navigate social media and utilise technology increased the engagement of those unable to attend the Culture-Nature Journey in person and shows that the EPWG is crucial to maintaining ICOMOS’ leading role in cultural heritage in the future.

As the subject of the Emerging Professionals was a major topic of discussion in Delhi, there were consequently a number of key points that reflect this in the Resolutions from the General Assembly. As a part of ICOMOS’ mission to ‘Foster active and wide membership links and connections for an empowering engagement in the future of heritage conservation’, ICOMOS determined to ‘Involve emerging professionals in all ICOMOS activities including training, mentorship, public advocacy and the dissemination of knowledge’ (ICOMOS 2017, Resolution 19GA 2017/09). Further the resolutions sought to ‘Encourage Emerging Professionals
to develop new initiatives’ as a strategy to assist in achieving the Objective of reaffirming ‘the role of ICOMOS as a leading advocate and think-tank for the conservation of cultural heritage worldwide’ (ICOMOS 2017, Resolution 19GA 2017/09).

The most important resolution relating to the Emerging Professionals was Resolution 19GA 2017/33 which detailed the ‘Emerging Professionals Initiative’. This came about as a result of the work of the EPWG which urged ICOMOS to incorporate their group into all levels of the organisation. This will further help to maintain ICOMOS’ scientific relevance for future generations and was a significant milestone. The following requests were made to the ICOMOS Board:

1. Encourage the nomination to the Emerging Professionals Working Group of one representative from all National Committees and International Scientific Committees that are currently not yet represented in this working group, by 1 February 2018;
2. Encourage the formation and recognition of Emerging Professionals Working Groups within all individual National and International Scientific Committees to collaborate nationally and internationally during the 2017-2020 triennium;
3. Include arrangements for dedicated Emerging Professionals sessions at the General Assemblies in 2018, 2019 and 2020;
4. Encourage the National and International Scientific Committees to engage with ICOMOS Emerging Professionals at their meetings and conferences both at the national and international level, and that they include updates on such activities in their annual reports;
5. Nominate a contact person or persons to liaise with the EPWG on behalf of the Board;
6. Include a report from the EPWG on progress in these initiatives and its work in the agendas of future Advisory Committee and Board meeting and to submit this report annually to the General Assembly;
7. Seek the advice of the International Scientific Committee on Legal, Administrative and Financial Matters (ICLAFI) on how the recognition of EPs within the ICOMOS Statutes can be improved to facilitate their meaningful involvement in ICOMOS Committees;
8. Endorse EPWG involvement with regular ICOMOS projects such as the International Day for Monuments and Sites, and regional activities such as the European Year of Cultural Heritage 2018;
9. Endorse the recognition and inclusion of representatives of the EPWG within existing ICOMOS communication channels. (ICOMOS 2017, pp.24-25)

Looking to the future

The long-term impact of the Emerging Professionals remains to be seen. At Delhi, they clearly had a part to play and made an impression, particularly through their calls to be better involved in ICOMOS. I have no doubt that the EPWG will continue to have an impact over the next few years and will have an even greater presence at the 2020 ICOMOS General Assembly in Sydney, Australia. Hopefully with all the Resolutions made regarding Emerging Professionals we will see them better included into the work of ICOMOS.

Since Delhi, there have already been examples of Emerging Professionals engaging in the promotion of cultural heritage. For example, the ICOMOS Emerging Professionals Working Group led the 2018 International Day for Monuments and Sites using the hashtag #heritage4generations. They organised and led events in each country and focused on reaching younger generations through the use of social media. Clearly, Emerging Professionals are aware of the importance of effectively commanding social media and should be recognised for their understanding of this and their new ideas for enhancing cultural heritage practice and public engagement with cultural heritage. Nonetheless, I would argue that it is not just through the ability to take command of
social media and utilise new technologies that Emerging Professionals can contribute to the future of heritage practice. There are so many of us, young graduates and those in the early stages of our careers, that have voices filled with new ideas waiting to be heard. It is the voice of the Emerging Professionals that will help to stimulate change and carry ICOMOS and cultural heritage practice with fervour into the future.

For those wanting to get involved with the Australia ICOMOS Emerging Professionals please visit https://australia.icomos.org/get-involved/youngearly-career-professionals/

References
