Introduction

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Going to Delhi: Australian perspectives and contributions to the 19th ICOMOS General Assembly

The triennial General Assembly is the highest and most inclusive decision-making structure of ICOMOS. As we complete our work on this issue of Historic Environment, one year has passed since the most recent of these events, held in Delhi in December 2017, and hosted with immense vitality by ICOMOS India.

In common with past General Assemblies, many ICOMOS members and friends from Australia, New Zealand and Pasifika travelled to India to take part. However, even for those that attended the Assembly, it is not possible to ‘know’ or experience it fully because there are so many parts, all happening within a very compressed programme. It is therefore not easy to perceive the Australian contribution or to share it with those unable to attend. Through a period of nearly two weeks, everyone was busily coming and going, passing in the corridors, enjoying yummy lunches and teas, mingling at cultural performances and social events, and taking the opportunity of the excursions to heritage places in Delhi guided by our Indian colleagues – from the unforgettable markets, to the World Heritage listed Red Fort and Humayan’s Tomb – not to mention the meetings, side events, workshops, lectures, exhibitions, and more. The tradition of hosting a vast ‘Australian/New Zealand/Pasifika’ Dinner was continued thanks to the organisational prowess of Ian Kelly.

Perhaps some readers won’t know how ICOMOS works, and others might know ICOMOS best through its role as an Advisory Body to the World Heritage Committee. While giving ICOMOS a high profile, World Heritage is not the main purpose or mission of the organisation, which is to engage with and support heritage practice throughout the world, provide a forum for practitioners (whatever their discipline or field of work), and to seek and share diverse forms of heritage practice.

ICOMOS is the International Council on Monuments and Sites. It is a global organisation with an elected international Board, and an international Secretariat based in Paris. The strength of ICOMOS is based on its National Committees (such as Australia ICOMOS) in more than 100 countries, and several dozen International Scientific Committees (ISCs) focused on particular themes and specialisations in heritage practice. Each of these bodies has its own governance structure. The ISCs form the Scientific Council of ICOMOS; and both the ISCs and National Committees are represented within the ICOMOS Advisory Committee, which meets annually. During the period of the General Assembly, many ISCs held their own annual meetings, workshops or symposia, and took the opportunity to visit heritage places and cultural institutions, hosted by their Indian colleagues. Similarly, the National Committees met in regional groups to exchange experiences and identify common issues. The Advisory Committee (AdCom) meets as part of the General Assembly, and plays a central role in shaping the scientific programme and is critical for completing the work of the triennium, finalising a range of matters that are
forwarded to the Board and then the General Assembly in the form of Resolutions. You can read more about the inside workings of the AdCom meeting in Delhi in the report in this volume from Sheridan Burke.

Until 2014, the ICOMOS General Assembly was held every three years, to represent the physical and intellectual coming together of the entire global membership of ICOMOS. Since that time, due to some changes to the Statutes, a General Assembly is held every year, but the ‘triennial’ General Assembly remains the pinnacle of governance and intellectual exchange for the organisation. The triennial GA is a multi-faceted experience for those that attend. Some components are the business of the organisation – the review of triennial reports, elections, adoption of resolutions, and sometimes difficult debates on the organisational health and direction. These are overseen by people appointed to be the office bearers of the organisation during the Assembly – allowing those that have led the organisation to that point to resume the mantle of members.

Behind the scenes, ICOMOS India and the Secretariat staff supported the business of the Assembly, aided by truly amazing teams of volunteers. Committees were established by the General Assembly with care for the diversity of gender, geocultural region, discipline and language competency to look after the crafting of the resolutions and the major declaration that was adopted; and issues such as the conduct of the elections and validity of the candidatures. Prior to the Assembly itself, other committees will have performed important roles, such as the distribution of funds designed to ensure that people from all parts of the world are present (these funds were provided by many individual members, National Committees and the Victoria Falls Fund); and the proposal for the recipients of several prestigious Honorary Awards such as the Gazzola Prize, the bursary awarded by the Raymond Lemaire Fund for Next Generation Skills, and the announcement of the highly esteemed colleagues that are henceforth named as Honorary Members of ICOMOS.

The participation of Emerging Professionals was a notable success of the 19th General Assembly. The report in this volume by Gabrielle Harrington provides some insights into how this worked at Delhi, and the future plans by the Emerging Professionals Working Group. These came to further fruition in 2018, with the successful programming and networking led by Emerging Professionals at the Advisory Committee session in Buenos Aires.

As already mentioned, many ISCs held their own meetings and events in conjunction with the General Assembly. In addition, there was an ISC marketplace session where ISCs showcased their work and recruited new members. In addition to the conviviality of this session, it is part of efforts by the ISCs to ensure their continued vitality and currency. As explained in the paper in this issue by Steve Brown, work by the ISCs on various types of ‘doctrinal texts’ must come to a triennial GA for adoption by the membership of ICOMOS. As Steve explains, many of these will have had years, even a decade or more of gestation, and their finalisation and adoption is a moment of great achievement for those members. Four doctrinal texts were adopted at the General Assembly: ICOMOS-IFLA Principles concerning Rural Landscapes as Heritage; ICOMOS-IFLA Document on Historic Urban Public Parks; Salalah Guidelines for the Management of Public Archaeological Sites; and the Principles for the Conservation of Wooden Built Heritage.

The Scientific Symposium is the portion of the General Assembly that has been most lovingly prepared by the host National Committee. The main theme – Heritage and Democracy – was developed by ICOMOS India in consultation with the ICOMOS Board. An international Scientific Committee directed the processes of disseminating the theme worldwide, call and receipt of thousands of proposals and abstracts from which the final program was crafted. The symposium ran in the middle days of the Assembly, with a number of sessions and streams running in parallel – posing agonising choices for delegates! Throughout there were also countless working lunches, book launches, poster sessions, workshops, capacity building session on every topic of interest to ICOMOS members. In Delhi, the Scientific Symposium was co-chaired by Sheridan Burke (Australia) and Nupur Prothi Khanna (India) who have each contributed papers to this issue.
The scientific symposium was separated into three streams that reflected the main theme of ‘Heritage and Democracy’. A number of Australians presented papers under these themes and have contributed papers to this volume of *Historic Environment*. The first stream concerned ‘Integrating Heritage and Sustainable Urban Development by engaging diverse Communities for Heritage Management’. The sub-themes were: Sustainable Development and Community Engagement; Management and Documentation; and World Heritage.4

The second stream focused on ‘The role of Cultural Heritage in Building Peace and Reconciliation’. Its nuances are reflected on by the paper in this volume by Melathi Saldin and Catherine Forbes, who situate this within an Australian context. Julia Mayer’s paper on the Anlong Veng Peace Centre in Cambodia provides a site-specific example of how documenting and sharing the history of the Khmer Rouge period at Anlong Veng (a site entrenched in the history of the Khmer Rouge Genocide) can contribute to healing for all Cambodians. Other papers addressed the sub-themes of ‘Heritage as Peace Builder’, ‘Heritage as Victim’ and ‘Recreating Ideas of Memory’. Fostering peace and reconciliation through cultural heritage places is clearly one way to reconcile difficult pasts.

The third stream of the symposium concerned ‘Protecting and Interpreting Cultural Heritage in an Age of Digital Empowerment’. This is a such an important area of Cultural Heritage to focus on in this digital age and there were many ideas on how to use digital media to safeguard and interpret our cultural heritage. In this volume, Cristina Garduño Freeman, who presented a paper under this theme, delves into the implications of experiencing World Heritage through digital media. Other papers addressed the sub-themes that looked at the relevance and application of digital tools for community engagement, interpretation and disaster management practices.

An extra fourth stream – the Culture Nature Journey – was included in the Scientific Symposium at Delhi to continue the immense momentum established by the ‘NatureCulture Journey’ at IUCN’s World Conservation Congress in Hawai ‘i’ in 2016. The genesis of these ‘journeys’ and the way this stream worked within the General Assembly program is explained in the paper by Susan McIntyre-Tamwoy, who together with Tim Badman of IUCN chaired this component. The Culture Nature Journey did not adopt the same format as the other streams, and featured a more diverse range of session styles, such as workshops, discussion panels and ‘knowledge cafes’ (smaller round-the-table discussions on set topics). The report by Anita Yousif in this issue of *Historic Environment* captures just one of these intense knowledge café sessions. Just within this volume of *Historic Environment*, the variety and breadth of the exchanges in the Culture Nature Journey indicate the importance of continuing this journey. Stephanie Johnston reports on a session which posed the question ‘Do Landscapes Migrate?’ and looks at this metaphorical question in relation to the Mount Lofty Ranges in South Australia. Caroline Grant introduces the heritage of pome fruit and how we can use the past to sustainably cultivate pears and apples for the future. Finally, Jane Lennon explains how we can value the transformation that occurs to places that are abandoned and decaying as part of conserving heritage within a rural Australian landscape.

The outcomes of the General Assembly are available on the ICOMOS website5 and ICOMOS India has published the Proceedings of the three streams from the Scientific Symposium. With the kind permission of ICOMOS, the *Delhi Declaration on Heritage and Democracy* and the *Yatra aur Tammanah: Our Purposeful Journey, Our Wishful Aspirations for Our Heritage* (the statement from the culturenature journey) have been reproduced in this issue of *Historic Environment*.

The closing of the 19th General Assembly was of particular importance to Australia and the Pacific region. The elections held at the 19th General Assembly saw the election of Peter Phillips to the position of Secretary-General of ICOMOS, the first Australian to reach this highly esteemed and significant role. And finally, Australia ICOMOS President Ian Travers and Australia’s General Assembly Bid coordinator Richard Mackay had the immense and joyful privilege of inviting the global membership of ICOMOS to the 20th ICOMOS General Assembly to be held in Sydney Australia in October 2020.6 So, we will do it all again, but this time here at home. Don’t miss it!
We hope that this issue of Historic Environment provides yet another way of capturing the longer term benefits of the global exchanges that the General Assembly makes possible.7

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Guest Editors

Endnotes


2 The Gazzola Prize was established in 1979 in memory of Piero Gazzola, a founder of ICOMOS. The Prize is awarded to an individual or group of people that have contributed with distinction to the aims and objectives of ICOMOS.

3 These can be found – with all the other such texts adopted by ICOMOS over the years – on the ICOMOS website: https://www.icomos.org/en/what-we-do/involvement-in-international-conventions/standards (accessed 5 March 2019).

4 Outcome statements for each of the themes are available from: https://www.icomos.org/images/DOCUMENTS/General_Assemblies/19th_Delhi_2017/Subtheme_Reviews_SM.pdf (accessed 5 March 2019).

5 All the outcomes can be found at: https://www.icomos.org/en/about-icomos/governance/general-information-about-the-general-assembly/future-annual-general-assemblies-2016-2017 (accessed 5 March 2019). You can also watch some of the events on the ICOMOS Youtube channel: https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCI39Z5tdf8WTl3Gw7Zr3qRg?reload=9 (accessed 5 March 2019).

6 You can also see the small video that was played on that day on youtube: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jkueh0-7fGU&t=8s (accessed 5 March 2019).

7 Finally, our sincere thanks to the unsung heroes of this and every journal – the many colleagues that responded to our requests for peer review of the articles.