Preface: Culture: Conserving it Together

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This is the second 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 papers in this volume were mostly presented on Day 2 of the conference under Theme 3—Diverse Communities, Intangible Heritage. This theme considered how communities engage with and value their heritage and sought to connect place, people, nature and cultural practices. It also asked: what is heritage today and how does it connect communities across the Pacific? The first two papers in this volume were presented on Day 1 under Theme 2—Cultural Landscape Practice and Management, which focused on current issues facing cultural landscapes and sharing practices that contribute to their sustainable management. The last paper was presented under Theme 4—Heritage as a Pillar of Sustainable Development. However, these themes are deeply inter-related and the papers delivered under the other themes also addressed communities and their heritage.

The authors of these papers were from Australia, Fiji, Mexico, New Zealand, Taiwan and Vanuatu. The papers range geographically from Rapa Nui to the Torres Straits, and from Sydney to Fiji.

Geoff Ashley’s paper describes two private shack settlements, one south of Sydney and the other north of Perth, built on public lands as temporary accommodation these shacks were for recreation only not work in the mid twentieth century. He finds that management needs to respect the values held by both the public and directly associated communities with a cultural landscape approach that through agreement leads to engagement, trust and a generational transfer of responsibility.

Sue Jackson-Stepowski explores a little discussed aspect of Rapa Nui—the transformation of its cultural landscape in the 1880s by sheep grazing. This darker story of the island’s recent past saw local people confined to a tiny peninsula and it is proposed to be told to visitors by adapting the Chilean listed heritage shearing shed as an interpretation centre.

Alex Yen, associate professor of architecture in Taipei, considers how the UNESCO World Heritage Committee’s 5Cs Strategy (Credibility, Conservation, Capacity-building, Communication and Community) has been applied to the conservation of a culturally rich village on the island of Qionglin, Taiwan. He describes the Taiwan Ministry of Culture Regeneration of Historic Sites Program which aims to revitalize cultural heritage resources at a community level and to regenerate the regional cultural landscape through public investment. The 1,600 year old traditional settlement of Qionglin with its living Fujian culture is one of the twenty-two ‘on-site’ projects to implement the integrative policy of local-culture-based conservation.

The Festival Internacional Cervantino in Guanajuato, Mexico is discussed in the paper by Daniel Barrera-Fernández and Marco Hernández-Escampa. Using this example they address themes of traditional cultural events, built heritage and placemaking. They find that when traditional festivities become the basis for international cultural events, there are positive and negative
consequences for cultural heritage places. These events help improve social cohesion, street vibrancy, tourism attraction and local pride but when tourism and marketing interests become the priority, the event loses authenticity and residents can feel excluded as well as being negatively impacted by the concentration of large numbers of visitors in limited spaces.

Jacqueline Paul and Jade Kake take us to New Zealand. Their paper considers how Kaupapa Māori methodologies and Mātauranga Māori (Māori knowledge), as opposed to Eurocentric systems, can shape plans and policies for future sustainable development, and support better-localised solutions. They discuss the Te Aranga principles and explore ways they could be embedded in planning and policy to inform more culturally appropriate and authentic design practices. Intangible heritage needs heavier weighting in policies at all levels, and to be fundamentally integrated into practices and governance structures.

Dr Leah Lui-Chivizhe, a Torres Strait Islander based at the University of Sydney, is exploring the Macleay Museum’s nineteenth century ethnographic and natural history collection and how Islanders might engage with the collection for remembering and performing history. The basis of the collection was the 1875 Chevert Expedition. She focuses on Erub (Darnley Island) and Erubam le ways of knowing and being in place and discusses the Macleay’s collections from Erub.

Language maintenance and revitalisation in Vanuatu is the topic of the collaborative paper authored by Dr Mark Love, Anne Brown, Samuel Kenneth, Gorden Ling, Roselyn Tor, Miriam Bule, Gideon Ronalea, Siro Vagaha, Kaitip Kami and Daniel Luki. This paper examines three social development projects from the linguistically diverse nation of Vanuatu, that each seek to promote, support, and maintain vernacular languages. Language is crucial to the practice and transmission of intangible cultural heritage but diversity is shrinking. These relatively low cost, home-grown approaches to local language maintenance, are an innovative and promising model for combating language shifts.

Nick Thieberger’s paper is also about Pacific languages and focuses on making language records accessible, particularly audio recordings. The Pacific and Regional Archive for Digital Sources in Endangered Cultures (PARADISEC) project began in 2003 by digitising analogue tape collections and making them discoverable. These tapes belonged to retired or deceased researchers or institutions, in localities as distant as Basel, and would otherwise have been stored and difficult to find and access. The project now has material from 1,175 languages and is building links with people and agencies in the Pacific and working on ways of getting information to the source communities.

The last paper in this volume is by Penny Allan, Lizzie Yarina, and Martin Bryant of Australia. It arises from a project undertaken with ten Masters of Landscape Architecture students from Wellington, NZ, and conducted in Levuka, Fiji, in 2017—after the 2016 Cyclone Winston. The paper explores the historical and geographic background of Ovalau Island and the heritage values where the conservation of buildings in a colonial port sits at odds with an indigenous culture struggling to thrive in a place beset by economic and environmental disturbance. The paper notes that the built fabric in Levuka has little capacity to absorb impacts but the town’s landscapes and interstitial spaces could. Small-scale local design proposals of paths, pavilions, markets and gardens are described. Landscape is suggested as a potential middle ground between the tensions of conservation and resilience.

These papers explore diverse aspects of Pacific communities’ heritage from many different cultural perspectives, many with ideas that may be applied in other places. They contribute to developing sustainable management practices for a range of aspects of Pacific heritage.