24 February 2014

Mr Gustavo Araoz
By email: gustavo.araoz@icomos.org

Dear Gustavo

Reconstruction at Heritage Places in Australia

Several members of Australia ICOMOS have completed the questionnaire about Reconstruction at cultural heritage places. Others have attempted the questionnaire but did not get past the first three questions, as it was found hard to answer these questions from an Australian perspective, as the questions were so general. Answers to the questions differed depending on the locality eg Australia, Asia and Europe.

To supplement the information gained from the questionnaire, and provide an Australian perspective, Australia ICOMOS has prepared the following response. It focuses on buildings and other works, but it is also recognized that the concept of Reconstruction can also apply to other matters that contribute to significance- such as use, setting, or intangible heritage.

Reconstruction in Australia – the approach

The Burra Charter was a ‘translation’ of the Venice Charter into the Australia heritage context. At the time, 1978-9, grants had become available for heritage work and guidelines were needed about best conservation practice for heritage agencies, funding bodies, local government authorities and owners. So, in drafting the charter, more precision about language was needed than in the Venice Charter; and definitions about all the processes of conservation were developed.

The Burra Charter has become the common standard for cultural heritage practice in Australia and is the basis for the detailed guidelines that heritage agencies have now developed.

Definition

Article 1.8 Reconstruction means returning a place to a known earlier state and is distinguished from restoration by the introduction of new material.

Explanatory note: New material may include recycled material salvaged from other places. This should not be to the detriment of any place of cultural significance.

Background

In 1970s Australia, the complete prohibition of reconstruction was against the spirit of the growing interest in built heritage, so a more moderate approach was adopted. Much of the work to heritage buildings involved the reconstruction of lost features or details; eg due to decay, lack of maintenance or an expedient approach to building management. Reconstructing features (such as verandahs or chimneys) was desirable for the functioning of buildings; and other reconstruction was desirable to complete a damaged structure.
Criteria (reasoning) for reconstruction

Articles 18 and 20 state the criteria for Reconstruction:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ARTICLE</th>
<th>Explanatory note</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **Article 18. Restoration and reconstruction**  
Restoration and reconstruction should reveal culturally significant aspects of the place. | |
| **Article 20. Reconstruction**  
20.1 Reconstruction is appropriate only where a place is incomplete through damage or alteration, and only where there is sufficient evidence to reproduce an earlier state of the fabric. In some cases, reconstruction may also be appropriate as part of a use or practice that retains the cultural significance of the place. | Places with social or spiritual value may warrant reconstruction, even though very little may remain (e.g. only building footings or tree stumps following fire, flood or storm). The requirement for sufficient evidence to reproduce an earlier state still applies.  
20.2 Reconstruction should be identifiable on close inspection or through additional interpretation. |

**Funding for Reconstruction**

Reconstruction of whole buildings or other structures is generally not supported by heritage agencies or funding. An exception is relatively small works – such as a garden pavilion or wall - which is a key component of a larger composition. Reconstruction of parts of buildings (especially facades) destroyed by fire, is another example which might attract funding. Recently, one of the oldest buildings in Canberra was severely damaged by fire; and reconstruction of the damage to the face is likely. An unusual recent reconstruction example is work at Port Arthur at the Separate Prison (1849) where sections of walls were reconstructed to better understand the original functioning, layout and appearance of the building.

Community groups sometimes promote and request reconstruction of demolished buildings, eg the home of a deceased important person. These projects rarely, if ever, eventuate, as the group discovers all the issues involved. Similarly, the funding of projects involving the moving of buildings (which always involves some reconstruction) is not generally supported unless this is a last resort and the only remaining option for conservation.

**Reconstruction and Interpretation**

In Burra Charter practice, reconstruction is often undertaken for interpretative purposes, but always in accordance with the criteria.

At places where buildings and other structures have been demolished, new modern buildings are sometimes erected on the footprint of the old building. These buildings sometimes have new uses that support the functioning of the place for visitors.


Is there a problem with reconstruction in Australia?

There is not generally support for reconstruction in Australia, as might be the case in some other countries, though there have been occasions when an enthusiasm for reconstruction has arisen in the case of ruined structures. But these cases are infrequent.

Australia ICOMOS remains keenly interested in this issue and would like to be involved in any further discussions about reconstruction.

Yours sincerely

Ms Elizabeth Vines OAM, President, Australia ICOMOS