Social value and the conservation of urban heritage places in Australia

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Abstract

Across the world, researchers and practitioners are recognising the potential of social value to bolster the conservation of heritage places. Operating alongside aesthetic and historic significance, the integration of social value into conservation practice seeks to enhance the assessment and management of cultural heritage by dissolving divides between practitioners and communities. Australia has long been recognised as a trailblazer in the development of social value due to its inclusion in the 1979 Burra Charter, but social value’s adoption in identification processes and its implementation in practice has undergone various evolutions in the past four decades. Its current meaning is far more disputed than either aesthetic or historic value. To provide stronger foundations for ongoing examinations of social value, this article historicises notions of social value in the Australian urban conservation context. It focuses on Melbourne and draws on extensive heritage literature and urban history archival research to suggest that social value was a tangential inclusion in the 1979 Burra Charter. It relates examples of where social value has come to the fore in heritage practice, including Flinders Street Station in the 1970s–80 and the Melbourne Cricket Ground (MCG) in the 1990s–2000s. Social value has been reworked to meet changing urban and heritage priorities but has never quite achieved its potential: placing people at the heart of conservation practice and heritage places.

Introduction

Safeguarding the relationship between people and place lies at the heart of heritage conservation. To achieve this, critically-engaged researchers and practitioners are refreshing their conceptions of cultural heritage significance, supplementing traditional notions of aesthetic and historic value with social value. Since the emergence of the modern conservation movement in Europe in the nineteenth century, for a place to be deemed significant enough for retention, in part or whole, it has had to surpass implicit or explicit thresholds of significance, as assessed by practitioners, against broader principles and guidelines. Drawing on the postmodern assumption that heritage is socially constituted and contingent rather than contained within and intrinsic to place (and its historic fabric), social value has been increasingly championed by researchers and practitioners as an additional threshold of significance and linchpin of value.

The ambition of social value has been to embrace communities, people and their relationships to and associations with heritage places as part of the conservation, identification, analysis, management and interpretation of heritage places. In the literature, social value has been perceived as part of narrowing, or even eliminating, the divide between community and place in conservation practice (Schofield 2014; Smith 2006). After all, theoretical distinctions
such as significance, values and thresholds are of much more interest to practitioners than the community at large, whose relationship to place might be characterised as ineffable, variable and expansive, embracing aspects that are at once material (or physical), i.e. fabric and intactness, and immaterial (or intangible), i.e. narratives and experiences (Lesh 2020).

The article explores the history of Australian urban heritage ideas, regimes and practices and, specifically, interrogates social value by disentangling it from conventional and presentist accounts of its development. It draws on original and extensive urban history archival research to contribute a historical dimension to ongoing debates about the relationship between conservation, people and place. The many studies, reports and regulations considered in this article provide an important but incomplete perspective on social value, and so a range of additional sources—including published and unpublished social, cultural and oral history material—are utilised as part of this article’s methodology. The diversity of sources reflects how conservation knowledge circulates within practitioner networks, often taking tacit rather than codified forms. By interpreting the rich primary archival record of Australian urban history and heritage management, this article’s critical approach to social value emerges.

This article examines the relationship between social value and heritage conservation in Australian cities with a focus on the urban context of Melbourne. In 1990s Melbourne, particularly, crucial social value ideas were formulated and tested, and so this city and its heritage places serve as a useful case study to examine this broader phenomenon. Urban thinkers have also played a significant role in shaping how heritage researchers and practitioners have understood social value during its various evolutions (Gregory 2009; Freestone 1995; Davison 1991a). Social value has undergone three key periods of historical development. These correspond to its infant stage in the 1950s–60s, its popular stage in the 1970s–80s, and its formalisation stage since the 1990s. Intermingling micro case studies such as Flinders Street Station in the 1970s–80s and the Melbourne Cricket Ground (MCG) in the 1980s–90s, this article reveals how social value has been understood and employed by practitioners, with each successive period building on earlier developments. Each case study operates within the urban, architectural, planning and conservation paradigms of the time period(s) when they were assessed and protected, and so illustrates changing conceptions of heritage and value. The second section on the 1970s–80s incorporates detailed analysis relating to the tangential inclusion of social value in the 1979 *Burra Charter*. Social value emerges as a particularly malleable heritage value.

**Defining social value**

Places in cities are shaped by heritage conservation processes (Kalman 2014; Freestone 2010; Pendlebury 2009; Larkham 1996). Architects, planners and policymakers negotiate elaborate international, national, regional and municipal policy and legal environments around heritage. The role of specialist heritage practitioners is to manage, identify, measure and narrate the value of places in order to determine significance and then guide conservation. In her study of the World Heritage system (1972–2011), Finnish scholar Tanja Vahtikari (2017: 5) writes that ‘heritage may be seen as a continuous cultural process in which social and cultural meanings and values are created, negotiated and transmitted’. Notions of value and cultural significance underpin heritage conservation (Torre 2013; Gibson and Pendlebury 2009; Ireland 2002a; Avrami, Mason and Torre 2000). American historian Randall Mason (2002: 12) defines social value through ‘social connections, networks and other relations…not necessarily related to cultural historical values’ and ‘includes the “place attachment” aspects of heritage value’ within its remit, namely ‘social cohesion, community identity, or other feelings of affiliation’ (cf. Manzo and Devine-Wright 2014; Lewicka 2011).

In this article, social value refers to the conscious embrace of communities and their perspectives by practitioners in the assessment and conservation of heritage places. Most optimistically, social value is generated, constituted and identified for places by communities, and then recorded and implemented by practitioners. It is a bottom-up people-focused aspect of conservation practice, rather than a top-down expert-driven phenomenon. Despite changing trends in local and international heritage management, this general approach to social value
has been evoked in the Australian context since at least the 1990s. However, these ideas have a longer, contested past. From the 1970s, for instance, Anglo-American geographer David Lovewthall (2015) deconstructed the historical and spatial contingencies of heritage and the means and ways it has been valued and protected by societies. Subsequently, social historian Raphael Samuel (1994) sought to democratise the idea of heritage for the UK context. Recently, British archaeologist Siân Jones (2017: 93; S. Jones and Leech 2015) has found allusions to social value in the conservation sphere from the nineteenth century, but notes it only ‘became an explicit component of conservation policy and practice [in the twentieth century] coinciding with increasing attention to broader, non-expert perceptions of heritage and the communal values associated with these’.

The cultural heritage values of aesthetic and historical significance had been addressed in international heritage practice by the mid-twentieth century. In 1903, Austrian art historian Alois Riegl (1996) stated modern societies think not of ‘deliberate’ monuments, but rather ‘artistic and historical monuments’. Riegl demarcated ‘age’, ‘historical’, ‘deliberate commemorative’ and ‘newness’ values. A notion that heritage possessed values was carried into heritage guidelines including the Athens Charter (1931) and Venice Charter (1964), the latter of which also mentioned archaeological value. The relationship between urban space, monuments and aesthetics, incorporating proto-notions of heritage value, was also theorised by Austrian architect Camillo Sitte in City Planning According to Artistic Principles (1889) for the modern town planning mode (Sitte 1965; cf. Sulman 1921: 18). Lists of heritage places prepared during the 1940s–60s across Europe, North America and Australia typically emphasised the architecture and history of the items listed (Glendinning 2013: 284–88; Lesh forthcoming).

The Australian Burra Charter—drafted in 1979, and revised in 1981, 1988, 1999 and 2013—has been credited as both a symbolic and practical transition towards a more sophisticated recognition of cultural heritage values, including social value. A key innovation of the Burra Charter has been to rationalise the value-orientated approach to heritage, not only for social value but also for aesthetic, historic, scientific and, in its subsequent revisions, spiritual values (Hanna 2015; M. Walker 2014; Sullivan 1993). All cultural heritage values named in the Burra Charter are to be treated equally. However, as explored below, this has rarely happened in practice. Each revision of the Burra Charter has also offered increasingly precise definitions for cultural heritage significance. In 1988 this was by relating it to people, in 1999 to associations and meanings, and in 2013 to change over time. Critics of the Burra Charter cite its complicity in the ‘authorised heritage discourse’: a critical theory which posits the ways practitioner expertise distances heritage from the communities to which it is said to belong (Smith 2006; Waterton, Smith and Campbell 2006). A rigid interpretation of this theory would suggest the genuine inclusion of social value in heritage management is not possible.

More practically, the Burra Charter’s philosophical similarities to the Venice Charter mean the Burra Charter has difficulty embracing social value because it still over-emphasises historic fabric. Critiques of the Venice Charter since the 1990s have suggested it was a modernist document, translated into heritage practice in ways that assumed objective intrinsic value in, and privileged tangible historic fabric at sites (Jokilehto 1999: 288–9; Glendinning 2013: 392ff.; Harrison 2013: 61, 98, 145). Contemporary conservation theory adopts a post–1980s theorisation of social value which treats the tangible and intangible features of places as embodying (within and beyond their fabric) a range of socially-constituted cultural heritage values. In heritage practice, the various revisions of the Burra Charter have still not wholly done away with the principle of inherency (Sulliwan 2015; Byrne, Brayshaw and Ireland 2003: 55, 8): the long-held assumption that the significance of places and things naturally resides within, rather than being given to, the heritage place and its historic fabric by societies over time. The most-recent Australia ICOMOS (2017: 3) practice note on intangible cultural heritage implies that not every place necessarily has an intangible component to its significance, suggesting that cultural heritage value can somehow be contained within the physical fabric of places.

Whether social value is more or less tangible or intangible than aesthetic or historical value, along with the fact that the term ‘intangible values’ itself is a tautology, is a matter of ongoing

The inclusion of social value within the Burra Charter has been internationally recognised as significant for the global history of heritage management (Taylor 2018; Sonkoly 2017: 40; Silberman 2015; Jerome 2014; Johnston 2014; Harrison 2013: 144–45; Jokilehto 1999: 289). Across the world, understanding the theoretical and practical basis for social value has become increasingly important as academics and practitioners have sought to better integrate social value into heritage conservation processes (Mornement, Garduño-Freeman and Lovell 2018; Historic England 2017: 9; Taylor 2016; Dümcke and Gnedovsky 2013; cf. Avrami, Mason and Torre 2000: 9, 18). In the last decade alone, organisations ranging from Historic England, the European Commission, US/ICOMOS, and the Heritage Council of Victoria have examined their social value arrangements. The various reports and studies make reference to the Australian genealogies of social value, but have not adequately accounted for the reasons why social value first appeared in the Burra Charter, nor the various evolutions that social value has undergone in Australian heritage theory and practice since at least the 1970s. While Aboriginal cultural heritage considerations might be assumed as the driver leading to the inclusion of social (and later spiritual) value in the Burra Charter, empirical historical research has the potential to complicate this conventional narrative, as this article does for the domain of urban heritage.

This article accepts that social value has been recognised in Australia for decades, but questions and challenges the assumption that Australia has therefore led the world in the assessment, implementation and conservation of social value. In 2001, heritage researchers Shaun Canning and Dirk Spennemann (2001: 458) wrote, ‘Social value is perhaps the most misunderstood and misused assessment criterion in the Australian cultural heritage management process’. That same year, practitioners Chris Johnston and Kristal Buckley (2001) made a similar point that public participation and social value were niche aspects of the conservation process. Almost two decades later in 2018, heritage researcher Cristina Garduño-Freeman (2018: 48) maintains that while ‘social value is acknowledged [in Australia], its use as a primary criterion for inscription is still not commonplace’. Even with the many advancements in heritage management in recent decades, conservation has not fully embraced social value. Ongoing endeavours to refresh conservation to encompass experiential, affective and emotional aspects of place may well have some potential to better address the challenges of social value (Madgin et. al. 2018; DeSilvey 2017; Smith and Campbell 2015).

A key ambition for scholars and practitioners examining social value has been to develop more robust approaches for its assessment and protection. That similar challenges related to the implementation of social value are being experienced across the world suggests a contradiction lies at the heart of discussions of the Burra Charter and Australian heritage management. Explicit notions of social value have operated in Australia since at least the 1970s (Byrne, Brayshaw and Ireland 2003: 4ff.; Pearson and Sullivan 1995: 16ff.; Marquis-Kyle and Walker 1992: 22; Kerr 1985: 8ff.), yet local conservation processes retain similar structural issues around the embrace of community perspectives as national contexts where social value has never formally existed. This historical examination of the genealogies of social value has relevance for ongoing scholarly and practitioner debates.
1950s–60s: frontiers of social value

Since the emergence of Australian twentieth-century modern town planning, heritage has been tied to notions of community. The interwar Melbourne Metropolitan Town Planning Commission report (1929: 267) identified the kinds of historical buildings that interested city planners. It detailed ‘The Location of Prominent Buildings’, including the Houses of Parliament and Treasury Building (Figure 1), along with the Public Library, Law Courts and Melbourne Town Hall—which ‘if given proper setting, are definite expressions of community pride’. These historical buildings certainly required retention for their aesthetic and historical reasons. Planners also made explicit that these buildings had the potential to serve a civic and moral purpose for the community (Davison 1991b: 17; Griffiths 1996: 195). Typically for the time, there was no clear-cut distinction between aesthetic, historical or social values, but all three values were implied within planning documents. Heritage was as much a past as a future concern for the city and its people.

In the immediate postwar period, the National Trust movement led the way in the evaluation of heritage places. Their self-appointed task was to raise a popular heritage consciousness by advocating around heritage issues, identifying places for conservation, and building property portfolios of historical places for the public to visit. For the Trusts, the Australian people were both the audience for and the guardians of heritage. The Trusts led institutional heritage efforts during this period, a unique feature of the Australian heritage landscape, as Melburnian and heritage policymaker David Yencken explained in 1973. Returning from a study tour of Europe, the UK, Canada and the US, Yencken (1973: 4) wrote that ‘No country used a body similar to our National Trusts to carry out any of the listing or administrative processes’ of conservation—although this would change following the Inquiry into the National Estate (1973–74) and the raft of federal, state and local heritage legislation which followed over the next two decades.

The heritage tasks of advocacy and classification intermingled for the state-based National Trusts. Despite being organisations founded and operated by elites, the National Trusts had a diverse range of interests (Witcomb and Gregory 2010: 15; Freestone 1999: 60; Davison 1991a: 17ff.). After the Victorian National Trust was established in Melbourne in 1956, its nascent classification processes were shared with the other National Trusts (Witcomb and Gregory 2010: 90; Wyatt 2005: 53). The first meeting of its ‘Sub-Committee of Survey and Identification’ was held in Melbourne on 16 December 1956. Its membership was formed of architects, including academic David Saunders. Heritage was broadly orientated towards...
the community for the National Trusts, and particularly Saunders who also sought to build a broader community consensus around conservation. The community could nominate places for National Trust classification, but there was no systematic consultation mechanism. Saunders developed the classification committee’s initial approach in 1959 around the guiding principles of ‘beauty, age, representative of social history, representative of building history, and other historical associations’ (Classification Committee, 6 August 1959). In 1962, the process was formalised around four values: ‘architectural’, ‘historical’, ‘social’ and ‘technological…which must be represented when making decisions’ (Classification Committee, 1 November 1962). This expanded list of values represented an evolution to the earlier thinking of, for instance, Riegl (1996).

This explicit appearance of social value alongside aesthetic, historical and scientific values in the early 1960s at the National Trusts demands further interrogation. The clearest indication of what was intended by the term ‘social value’ comes through the deliberations of the committee around specific places. A good example was proto-Edwardian Illawarra Mansion (1889–91) in the exclusive inner-suburb of Toorak. Illawarra was a large and ostentatious mansion built for land speculator Charles Henry James by builder G. B. Leith in 1889–91, during the ‘Marvellous Melbourne’ period of rapid urban and economic growth that was soon followed by a sizeable crash and depression. Illawarra came before the committee in 1966, and so was assessed against the general principles laid down in 1962. Illawarra’s architectural, historical and social value were recorded in meeting minutes.

Illawarra had ‘no particular merit in the aesthetic sense’, and its historical associations were also deemed insignificant. It reached the significance threshold based on its import as a ‘social document’:

The most interesting aspect of the house lies in the fact that it records the ostentatious display which typifies the larger homes of this period…It is for this reason that the house has been given a higher classification than if it had been judged purely on aesthetic grounds, or on the basis of historical significance of the early owners or occupiers (Classification Committee, 24 February 1966).

In statements to the media, the National Trust said ‘The importance of Illawarra was as a “social document of the boom era”’ and it was also the ‘first time that a completely self-supporting property had been given to a national trust [in Australia, sic]’ (‘Trust given old mansion’, Age 10 June 1966; Wright 1966; National Trust of Australia [Victoria] Archive 1966).

Illawarra was considered to possess social rather than historical value due to the traditional remit of historical inquiry and the character of historical practice at this time. Historical value was tied to older conceptions of capital-h History that emphasised narratives of nationhood and urban progress alongside associations with notable and prominent individuals who had contributed to that narrative (Ireland 2002b: 199). Heritage places had to unambiguously relate to this kind of past to be historically (or aesthetically) significant. Public buildings and national monuments were most likely to pass the test. Equally, the historical value of heritage had to serve a spiritual or didactic purpose in service of, in the Australian context, the national, state, or local community; as it did at the public buildings identified in the 1930s by town planners (Davison 1991b: 17; Griffiths 1996: 195). In contrast, the National Trust rendering

Figure 2: Illawarra House, Melbourne, Mark Strizic, Photograph, 1958. State Library of Victoria, Pictures Collection, H2008.11/357.
of social value was tied to emergent conceptions of social and urban history. This new historical mode expanded the potential of history to embrace the study of exceptional and everyday lives in urban space (Kelly 1984; Bongiorno 2015). These ideas were still too new and too radical to be considered historical value, and so entered the realm of social value. Social value, therefore, served this exciting frontier of historical inquiry and heritage practice. Illawarra reached the classification threshold because it demonstrated the social and economic life of the Marvellous Melbourne period.

While the inflection of both historical and social value would change over subsequent decades, the introduction of social history into heritage classification had the intention to preserve places, not on the basis of their being representative of the people, but rather for the people themselves (Davison 1991b: 11). Historian Graeme Davison made this evocative argument in 1991 because he believed it was the imperative of heritage practitioners to work alongside the community rather than on behalf of it (or, worse still, in service of the heritage practitioner’s own esoteric interests). This idea conjures one of the truest senses of the idea of social value and suggests an affinity between historical and social value, even as the temporal basis of social value shifted away from the past and towards the present by the close of the twentieth century. In other words, 1950s–60s social value embodied social history, the remit of which would soon be transferred into an expanded conception of historical value, as social history became a tenet of capital-h History itself.

The most-recent 1999 statutory heritage listing for Illawarra no longer identifies its social value. Rather, it possesses ‘historical significance for its association with the prominent land boom figure Charles Henry James (1848-1898) and as a remnant manifestation of the land boom itself’ (Victorian Heritage Register 1999). It is also listed for its architectural and scientific significance: as a flamboyant Victorian-era mansion, and for its wire wall construction, respectively. Heritage, and its historical and aesthetic values, soon adopted more explicitly material and more explicitly intrinsic meanings, leaving social value a prominent yet ill-defined vessel ready for re-definition into the 1970s.

**1970s–80s: Australian Heritage Movement**

Social value was next shaped by the Australian heritage movement, which operated from the late 1960s and faded during the 1980s (Davison 1991a). The National Trusts, architects and planners, politicians and policymakers, construction unions, resident action groups and communities themselves demanded stronger statutory heritage measures and a new mode of city building that prioritised people and conservation as part of urban development and change (Howe, Nichols and Davison 2013). The 1970s heritage movement focused on nineteenth-century historic environments in Australia’s capital city CBDs and inner suburbs. Heritage advocacy served to democratisate Australian conservation practice. At this moment, heritage was perceived as being constituted by the people themselves—described in the Inquiry into the National Estate (1974) as the ‘the things we want to keep’—and social value had the potential to capture this sentiment.

The Inquiry into the National Estate instigated the formalisation of social value in Australian heritage management. Initiated by the Whitlam Government in 1973 (Lesh 2019; Waterton 2018; Veale and Freestone 2012), the committee of inquiry examined four domains of heritage: the built environment, the natural environment, Aboriginal sites and other special areas, and cultural property. The National Trusts held some sway over proceedings. In addition to Yencken, another committee member was businessman Reg Walker of the NSW National Trust. Walker coordinated submissions from each of the state National Trusts (R. Walker 1973). Reflecting the progressive spirit towards environmentalism of the era, the report’s conclusion was that: ‘The Australian Government has inherited a National Estate which has been downgraded, disregarded and neglected’ (*Report of the National Estate* 1974: 334). The inquiry received over 650 submissions. Community sentiment and social history were terms used interchangeably in many of these heritage submissions, suggesting some continuity with the earlier 1950s–60s conception of social value and also hinting towards the future of the concept (Inquiry into the National Estate, 1973–74, doc. 1973/453: 37a).
The crucial submission for social value was prepared by J. M. Freeland on behalf of the National Trusts. Professor at the University of New South Wales (though he grew up in Melbourne), Freeland was the leading Australian architectural historian of the period and published the first comprehensive scholarly history of Australian architecture in 1968. Prepared in 1972, and so pre-dating the inquiry, Freeland’s submission contained an already-ratified report that he had prepared for the Australian Council of National Trusts (a national umbrella body founded in 1965 and led by Walker). Freeland’s report (1972: 3, 6) recommended a set of uniform heritage classification criteria: ‘architectural, historical, cultural, social, scientific or environmental significance and importance which, taken by themselves, justify a classification’; and, crucially, continued that ‘public esteem and regional or local importance...are not sufficient to justify an assessment’. However general, Freeland’s conception of social value was explicitly expert-driven rather than community formulated. Yet it was novel for the time and reflected the democratic and progressive conceptions for heritage circulating in the 1970s.

Freeland was also aware of the extent to which municipal authorities had been unable to address conservation, despite the desires of resident action groups and local communities. Social value was a potential solution. Councils ordinarily lacked the power to prevent building demolitions on social and economic grounds (incorporating community sentiment). In another National Trust report about future heritage legislation in NSW (also provided to the national estate inquiry), Freeland (1973: 7) cited an influential 1957 Sydney planning tribunal decision to permit the demolition of houses for a petrol station, contrary to the desires of the Leichardt community and council (Shell Co. of Australia v. Leichardt Municipal Council [262] 1957). For Freeland, incorporating social value into heritage and planning regulations could potentially overcome this well-known legal precedent. In addition to federal and state heritage legislation, the 1970s–80s introduction of conservation areas into urban planning eventually had this effect (e.g., National Trust of Australia [NSW] 1977; National Trust of Australia [Victoria] 1980). Community viewpoints became a defining factor of social value. However, Freeland also wrote that local distinction was not an adequate threshold for safeguarding a place.

The Federal Government adopted the Freeland or National Trust approach to social value (Inquiry into the National Estate, 1973–74, docs. 1973/212, 1973/185). Since they had undertaken the bulk of heritage classifications to date, it was in the National Trusts’ interest for the new national criteria to align with their general approach. Among the recommendations of the inquiry was the establishment of a statutory national agency for heritage. Following the November 1975 constitutional crisis and the dismissal of the Whitlam Government by the Governor-General, the incoming Fraser Liberal Government ultimately re-committed to the Australian Heritage Commission and the national estate: ‘To preserve areas and buildings of historical, social, cultural, ecological or environment significance’ (Australian Federal Government 1976: 700). The enabling federal legislation had the wording: ‘aesthetic, historic, scientific or social significance or other special value for future generations as well as for the present community’ (Australian Heritage Commission Act 1975). Cultural heritage significance guided the national commission in its preparation of the Register of the National Estate, the national heritage list, and its day-to-day activities including its grants and education programs. At the state government level, notions of social value appeared in legislation after 1975, alongside the traditional categories of historical and aesthetic associations (cf. Historic Buildings Act 1974 [Vic]; Heritage Act 1977 [NSW]).

The Australian Heritage Commission’s national estate grant programme supported the establishment of Australia ICOMOS in 1976, and the subsequent preparation of the Burra Charter in 1979 (Department of Home Affairs [Cth] 1980). In the process, social value was extrapolated from the urban sphere to become part of the new unified and integrated Australian heritage approach (Yencken 2011). Australia ICOMOS was tasked by the Australian Heritage Commission to develop guidelines for the conservation of heritage places, both to enhance conservation outcomes and to professionalise the heritage industry (Bourke 2004). The guidelines took the form of the Burra Charter, drafted by working groups that among others included built environment experts Miles Lewis and Jim Kerr. The 1979 Burra Charter included the line: ‘Cultural significance means aesthetic, historic, scientific or social value for past, present or future generations’ (Burra Charter 1979).
Kerr provided an early interpretation of the Burra Charter in practice in The Conservation Plan: A guide to the preparation of conservation plans for places of European cultural significance. Its first edition of 1982 makes no mention of any categories of value or significance. Its second edition of 1985 through to its final edition in 2013—which incorporated feedback from Lewis—quoted the definition of cultural significance provided in the Burra Charter. Kerr (1985: 8) explained that the source of these values were 1970s federal and state heritage legislation. He even critiqued the existing categories of value, ‘recognising the inadequacy of the wording’, and suggesting that ‘more precise categories of value may be developed as understanding of a particular place increases’ (Kerr 1985: 8). Kerr’s observation suggests that even by the mid-1980s, the streamlining of the identification of cultural heritage significance along the lines of the Burra Charter’s four original values (aesthetic, historic, scientific and social) had not yet been settled in Australian heritage practice.

From an urban heritage or built environment perspective, social value seems to be an extraneous feature of the 1979 Burra Charter. Given the lack of detailed discussions around social (or any other) cultural heritage values in the 1970s historical archive, it would appear that the term ‘social value’ had been carbon Kopied-from organisation to organisation, report to report, and document to document: drawn from National Trust heritage practice, brought into the Commonwealth policy and legislative arena, and then inserted back into heritage practice via ICOMOS and the Burra Charter. In other words, social value appeared in the 1979 Burra Charter because its sponsor was the Australian Heritage Commission, which had social value specified within its enabling legislation; due to the National Trusts and their role in the national estate inquiry which recommended the aforementioned legislation. In addition, key players at the Australian Heritage Commission—Yencken, Kerr and Max Bourke—were also intimately involved in ICOMOS and guided the preparation of the Burra Charter.

With the many people involved pursuing a shared heritage vision, it was entirely logical for the realms of Australian heritage ideas, regimes and practices to integrate a consistent and normalised set of cultural heritage values. Primary aims of the 1979 Burra Charter included producing a systematic process and uniform language for managing Australian heritage places. Social value was part of this language and process, an input into a fledging Australian assemblage of heritage ideas and practices. For these reasons, recent academic critiques of the Burra Charter and social value for being constitutive of an authorised mode of heritage management have been cogent and influential (Smith 2006; Waterton, Smith and Campbell 2006; Harrison 2013).

The suggestion above that the inclusion of social value in the Burra Charter was extraneous raises disciplinary tensions between the urban or built environment realm and other domains of heritage such as archaeology. An aspiration of the national estate inquiry was to chart an integrated and wholistic Australian philosophy for heritage. However, perceptions and interpretations of social value and other foundations of Australian heritage management have necessarily differed between, for instance, archaeologists traditionally concerned with Indigenous artefacts and architects traditionally concerned with built environments (Lesh 2019). Despite a growing awareness in the 1960s–70s of the deep Indigenous past among archaeologists (Griffiths 2019), there does not seem to be archival evidence to suggest a direct relationship between Indigenous heritage and the initial inclusion of ‘social value’ in the Burra Charter. Archaeologist John Mulvaney (2004)—who sat on the Australian Heritage Commission and helped draft the Burra Charter—saw Aboriginal cultural heritage, then called ‘prehistoric’ heritage, as operating in a related yet separate realm to post-settlement ‘historic heritage’, the latter of which was the original emphasis of the Burra Charter in the view of Mulvaney, as well as Kerr and Lewis. Although ICOMOS was concerned with both ‘prehistoric and historic heritage’ (Bourke et. al., 1983), these were two distinct domains of heritage, with the values crossover primarily occurring through notions of ‘universal scientific value’ (Ireland 2002: 143, 175).

Australia’s two leading built environment heritage thinkers of the period never truly embraced social value. Lewis (2011) said that there was ‘No logical reason’ for the specific values identified in the Burra Charter. ‘We got saddled with trying to find a meaning for scientific
and social significance that otherwise would not have been in the Charter at all’ had the Australian Heritage Commission not been involved. By dismissing scientific value, Lewis alludes to the 1970s divide in the values approach adopted by architectural historians as compared to archaeologists (as well as proponents of technological, scientific and industrial heritage). His rejection of social value suggests his traditionalist tendencies; in this view, aesthetic and historical significance are the rightful categories of heritage value, certainly for architectural heritage. Kerr’s discussion of social value in the 1985 edition of *The Conservation Plan* was the first prominent reflection among the drafters of the *Burra Charter* about the specific categories of value in the *Burra Charter* and, even then, these categories were still not considered by Kerr to be fixed. The final edition of Kerr’s *The Conservation Plan* (2013: 49) emphasises aesthetic and historical values in its primary sections, and then includes ‘social value’ within the glossary entry for a ‘sense of place’ (citing Chris Johnston).

Nevertheless, in practice, social value took on a specific meaning that drew from 1960s–70s academic and professional thinking on the relationship between urbanism and society. In 1972, the Victorian State Government proposed the Flinders Gate project for Melbourne (Urban Systems Corporation, Civil and Civic Pty. Ltd., and Meldon Properties Pty. Ltd. 1972). This redevelopment project involved the demolition of Flinders Street Station, except for the Flinders and Swanston Street entranceway arch façade which was to be retained (figure 3). A train station had existed on the site since the 1850s and, after construction delays, the existing Edwardian baroque building was completed in 1910. The main entrance to the station is accessed by a flight of steps, at the top of which is the iconic entranceway arch. Above the arch is a horizontal series of analogue clocks, each indicating the departure time of the next train on the city’s major suburban railway lines. This spot is a common meeting place. A newspaper reported in 1936: ‘There is a practice well known to Melbournites [sic]—that of meeting “under the clocks” at Flinders-street station’ (*Age* 26 December 1936: 10; Davison 1993: 62).

Threatened by demolition in 1972, the station came before the Victorian National Trust classification committee, which at this time included Lewis as a member. Over many meetings, the National Trust committee debated the listing of Flinders Street Station because it was a twentieth-century building (so perceived as too new) and also an ‘architectural monstrosity… the least scholarly of all public buildings in Melbourne’ (Classification Committee, 20 July 1972, 18 August 1972). The Edwardian Baroque was out of favour among the modern architects on the committee. After some discussion, it was ultimately classified as a ‘Melbourne landmark important for its position in the history of the railway systems, its social significance and as
a competition-winning design of its day’ (Classification Committee, 18 August 1972). The committee later clarified that the station held social value ‘as a major focal point of Melbourne’s city life in the early 20th century’ with ‘the “Clocks! section [sic] inextricably bound to the social fabric of Melbourne and Victoria’, while acknowledging it as ‘perhaps not aesthetically pleasing to some, but still evocative as the prime identifying symbol of Melbourne [emphasis in original]’ (National Trust of Australia [Victoria] Archive 1978). Despite a metropolitan newspaper thinking this a ‘strange’ decision (Herald 20 November 1972), the station survived after the public outcry, and also thanks to the economic shocks and reduction in urban investment and development following the end of the postwar Long Boom and the next year’s Oil Crisis.

The debate around Flinders Street Station—which continued even after its classification—suggested it had low aesthetic value, mid-to-high historical value and high social value. In the early 1980s, social value was explicitly defined by a National Trust Working Group on Classification and Citation Policy (1983–84), which included Miles Lewis and Chris Johnston as members. The working group recorded that social value ‘embraces the qualities by which a place has become a cultural landmark: a part of the community consciousness or a well-established focus of political, national or other cultural sentiment. It does not take account of more ephemeral contemporary associations’. This definition for social value was consistent with the Flinders Street Station classification deliberations of the previous decade. In this conception, social value materialised through everyday social practices of the public or urban community over an extended time horizon. A perception existed that the passage of time was necessary for an (ostensibly) objective canon of heritage places demanding conservation to formulate (though brand-new buildings were listed in Melbourne in the 1980s, including the Arts Centre complex). It had been other members of the classification committee in 1972, particularly the historians, who had identified the station’s social value in a way that would later resonate in heritage practice in the 1980s and 1990s.

The notion of social value employed in the 1970s–80s resembled Kevin Lynch’s definition of ‘landmarks’ in The Image of the City (1960). Lynch (1960: 78ff) argued that landmarks were a physical aspect of the urban environment which contributed to a city’s legibility in the mental maps of its inhabitants. Similarly, historian Andrew May (1993: 35) argued that the Flinders Street intersection with its surrounding landmarks—St. Paul’s Cathedral, Young and Jackson’s Hotel and the Station—produced a ‘pre- eminent sacred and secular ground, reinforcing the special prominence of the place in the mental cartography of Melburnians’ from at least the turn of the twentieth century. Social value had been defined in terms of community familiarity, established esteem and public adoration as formalised over time. Social value possessed at once historical, sociological and geographical impulses. Drawing on the 1972 National Trust listing, Flinders Street Station was state heritage listed in 1982, and the current citation expresses that:

The Flinders Street Railway Station Complex is socially significant [and] has a treasured place in the consciousness of many of the city’s inhabitants, and the steps under the clocks at the entrance of the main station building have been a popular meeting place for generations of Melburnians (Victorian Heritage Register 2015).

1990s–2000s: social value defined

‘What is Social Value?’ asked Chris Johnston (1992) in her influential report for the Australian Heritage Commission. Johnston had provided an answer some eight years earlier as a consultant on the Victorian State Government Heritage Plan (1984): ‘Social value embraces the qualities through which a place has become a cultural landmark, a part of community consciousness or a well-established focus of political, national or other cultural sentiment’ (Victoria National Estate Committee 1984: 6). Reflecting the circulation of heritage ideas in Melbourne, this definition for social value, indeed, mirrored that which had been collaboratively developed by the National Trust’s conservation policy working group. However, Johnston did not add that social value emerges over time. Rather, she suggested the possibility for consultation with existing community groups to assess social value for the present. Referencing the national estate, and simultaneously identifying a political basis for social value, Johnston then went a
step further. She drew on Yencken’s final major report as Chairman of the Australian Heritage Commission (1982: 19): ‘Lying behind all action to identify, conserve, and explain the National Estate there must be clear social objectives’. The response of the Victorian National Trust to the draft Victorian Heritage Plan provided a social objective: ‘Heritage conservation is not for one group only in our community—it is for young and old, recent migrants, the disabled, rich and poor’ (National Trust of Australia [Victoria] 1984: 8). For Johnston, Yencken and the National Trust, heritage was politically progressive and inherently social, an activity for people and communities. These ideas were again expressed in Johnston’s well-known 1991 report.

In the 1980s, heritage conservation underwent a transition from popular social movement to its incorporation into day-to-day urban policy and planning (cf. Pendlebury 2009, chap. 5). Davison (1991a: 26) wrote, ‘Many of the voluntary activists and enthusiasts of the late 1960s and 1970s became the professional consultants, managers and planners of the 1980s [and 1990s]’. Alongside the growth of conservation architecture and planning, the raft of new heritage regulations of the 1970s–80s contributed to the rationalisation of conservation processes (Yelland 1991; Boer and Wiffen 2005). In the 1980s context, heritage lost its political urgency. The response of practitioners such as Johnston was to posit a fresh political agenda for heritage via social value. Idealistically, Johnston suggested in What is social value? (1992: 25) that tempering urban development might be a positive social objective, in order to re-assert the community dimension into heritage management.

Heritage thinkers were seeking to re-ignite the political agency of heritage and re-engage with communities. The definitions of both historical and social value were simultaneously examined. A 1988 report by Sydney heritage planner Helen Proudfoot (1988: 44) for the Australian Heritage Commission on historical significance explicitly stated that ‘social associations’—the national estate register’s closest criteria to social value—necessarily had a strong historical component. Historians Chris McConville and Davison published A Heritage Handbook in 1991 to put the safeguarding of social and historical complexity on an equal footing with fabric retention in heritage management. In Melbourne, Davison, as Chairman of the Heritage Council of Victoria (1983–86), had considerable influence on redefining historical value, while Johnston was a key thinker and proponent of social value. Johnston drew on intellectuals and writers such as Kevin Lynch, Jane Jacobs, Yi-Fu Tuan, Edward Relph, David Lowenthal and Dolores Hayden. Social value became about ‘community’, ‘attachment’, ‘sense of place’ and ‘conflict’, and a number of workshops, papers and studies across Australia furthered the idea for conservation practice (Blair 1994; Pearson and Sullivan 1995: 153ff.; M. Walker and Debono 1998). This was a fresh multi-disciplinary approach for conceptualising the relationship between people and place, community and heritage.

Heritage practitioners engaged with social value in the 1990s. A 1991 amendment to Victoria’s heritage legislation identified that the Heritage Council was to assess ‘aesthetic, scientific, architectural, historic or social value of the building’ in its decision making (Historic Buildings [Further Amendment]) Act 1991 [Vic], s 7[3]). The new Heritage Act 1995 (Vic) explicited ‘social or cultural associations’ as criteria for the Victorian State Heritage Register (s 9[2]).
formed the basis for present-day Victorian Heritage Council (2014) Criterion G. As a consultant, Johnston and her firm Context built a reputation from the early 1990s for specialisation in social value as part of the preparation of heritage reports, particularly for municipal authorities (Clinch 2012: 158, 227). Rather than experts identifying significance exclusively from tacit knowledge and archival research, the best-practice approach was for practitioners to work alongside the community via formal consultation and engagement protocols to identify what was valuable to them.

Approaches to conservation and social value shifted in the 1990s and the MCG is an exemplar. The National Trust (1984–91) first attempted to have the MCG added to the state register in the 1980s when the sporting museum was built in 1984, and again when the Great Southern Stand was developed towards the end of the decade. These moves were resisted by the MCG Trust and the State Government on the assumption that a state listing would prevent the redevelopment of the site. Unlike in the 1980s, the MCG found a place in the state register in 2001. Informed by a conservation study prepared as part of the MCG’s Commonwealth Games (2006) redevelopment (Victorian Heritage Register 2001; Allom Lovell & Associates and Raworth 2000), social value contributed to the argument for the MCG’s significance. The State Government and MCG Trust agreed that ‘the matches and public not the buildings’ made the stadium important (Sunday Age 24 December 2000: 3). After consulting Melbourne Cricket Club members, the members’ stand (1927) was demolished (Figure 5) to make way for new grandstands. One of the grandstands incorporated the reconstructed historic Long Room, the members’ dining room. Writer Keith Dunstan declared that ‘The Melbourne Cricket ground has a long history of being fairly ruthless with its old clubhouses’ (Sunday Age 24 December 2000: 3). With its long lineage of continuous redevelopment, the MCG was conserved in ways that captured its evolving heritage significance as it was understood at the time.

In both theory and practice, social value in the 1990s transformed from being effectively a derivative of historical value (as had been the case since the 1950s–60s) to being defined, explored and realised in its own right. Social value was tied to notions of community and

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place attachment. To reveal social value required engagement with the community or, more straightforwardly, for a place to be threatened by redevelopment (T. Jones, Mozaffari and Jasper 2017). A difficulty in assessing social value was the suspicion of community and local knowledge in conservation circles (Tonkin 2009, in Clinch 2012: 263). Additionally, Davison (2000: 129) questioned whether the benefits of creating a rationalised means of assessing social value might be outweighed by the added burden and complexity within the conservation system, while also asking whether practitioners were sufficiently qualified to assess social value. A related issue was the lack of a systematic way to negotiate community sentiment when it emerged only after the proposed redevelopment of a place (an issue with continuity to the 1970s heritage movement). Conservation becomes equally concerned with the past and future of places, a doing away with notions that social value had to explicitly emerge over time.

Conclusion (2010s–): back to the future of social value

Since the immediate postwar period, social value has come a long way. Its infant stage occurred in the 1950s–60s and involved the National Trusts. At this time, social value and social history were treated interchangeably, securing the listing of the Illawarra mansion in Melbourne in 1966. Social value’s second stage, the 1970s–80s, intersected with the Australian heritage movement. The popular support for conservation combined with existing National Trust procedures contributed to social value entering the Inquiry into the National Estate and becoming a pillar of Australian heritage management. The Burra Charter incorporated social value and disseminated the concept across Australia and the world. Social value became more nebulous and related to inferred urban knowledge. It was reconstituted by leading heritage researchers and practitioners to serve the mental maps of city inhabitants and their local landmarks, such as Flinders Street Station. Australia had pioneered a specific kind of cultural heritage approach as part of which social value, broadly, had a role to play.

From the 1990s, social value took on many of the associations for which it is now known: explicitly community orientated, about people defining their own heritage through formal community engagement, and overtly addressing the qualities of place including but not limited to historic fabric. An emergent generation of practitioners gave it a fresh impetus as part of a renewed political mission for conservation. Social value came of age as a recognised aspect of the conservation process, appropriate for iconic heritage places such as the MCG, within the array of possibilities towards achieving enhanced conservation outcomes. Social value proposed a means by which places could be meaningfully safeguarded in ways that were not necessarily directly tied to physical fabric. Despite the frequent allusions to the 1979 Burra Charter in the international scholarship on social value, this third stage of development in the 1990s has actually had the strongest influence on global heritage practice. As at Flinders Street Station and the MCG, social value tended to be presented in ways that emphasised its apparent immateriality, at least more so than aesthetic or historic values. Such an assumption was problematic, since there was nothing more or less material or immaterial, tangible or intangible about social value than any other heritage value (Smith and Campbell 2017). Social value has been wrongly perceived as a lesser heritage value, perhaps because it is challenging to conserve through dominant heritage processes (which work best for historic fabric).

Reviewing half a century of Australian heritage ideas, regimes and practices, social value appears where elements of heritage places that did not quite fit within other categories of cultural significance have been assessed. Ultimately, social value may simply reproduce the same underlying tensions of other aspects of the conservation process; the authorised heritage discourse being so hegemonic as to make social value ineffective. More optimistically, social value could have the political potential to be an aspect of peoples’ claiming of the right to heritage in the city (Herzfeld 2015; Lefebvre 1996: 147ff.). Heritage has been an instrumental force in cities, and so the intensification of its political and social urgency could generate better conservation outcomes by continuously re-orientating heritage practice towards communities (Page: 2016). In order to fully realise its potential for conservation, social value demands ongoing critical and historical interrogation.
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