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The Scope and Definitions of Heritage: From Tangible to Intangible

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Since the adoption of the Venice Charter in 1964, there have been many conservation guidelines in the form of charters, recommendations and resolutions that have been introduced and adopted by international organisations such as UNESCO and ICOMOS. This article focuses on the scope and definition of heritage as promulgated by the various charters across the globe. The term 'historic monument' used in the Venice Charter 1964 was reinterpreted by ICOMOS in 1965 as 'monument' and 'site'; and by UNESCO in 1968 as 'cultural property' to include both movable and immovable. The different terminology between the UNESCO and ICOMOS was reconciled at the World Heritage Convention 1972. At national and regional levels the scope of heritage was broadened to include gardens, landscape and environment, and later reinterpreted and defined quite differently in Europe, Australia, New Zealand, Canada and China. Although the scope of heritage, in general, is now agreed internationally to include 'tangible' and 'intangible' as well as 'environments', the finer terminology of 'heritage' has not been streamlined or standardised, and thus no uniformity exists between countries.

Keywords: Charters; Heritage; Scope; Definition

The development of conservation principles in the second half of the 20th century has been regarded by many as the most significant achievement of conservation activities, internationally. These principles or guidelines, promulgated either as charters, recommendations, resolutions, declarations or statements, were drafted and adopted mainly by international organisations, such as UNESCO and ICOMOS, with the main objective of protecting cultural property, which includes historical monuments, buildings, groups of buildings, sites and towns around the globe, against various threats. The most significant guideline was the International Charter for the Conservation and

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Restoration of Monuments and Sites, commonly known as the Venice Charter 1964,[1] which set a remarkable benchmark for principles governing architectural conservation and restoration. The Charter has helped to broaden the concept of historic buildings, the application of modern technology in conservation works, international co-operation and, most important of all, has provided a set of principles for the protection of architectural heritage and sites. Since its adoption internationally in 1964, the Venice Charter has been used as a reference point for the development of a number of other conservation documents around the world.

To date, no fewer than 40 such documents exist both at international and national level; these have been initiated mainly by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) and the International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS). At least 27 had wider international focus and 17 had a more national or regional bias. Among those that are promulgated for international reference are the:

- International Charter for the Conservation and Restoration of Monuments and Sites (the Venice Charter), CATHM, 1964;
- Recommendation Concerning the Preservation of Cultural Property Endangered by Public or Private Works, UNESCO, 1968;
- Resolution of the Symposium on the Introduction of Contemporary Architecture into Ancient Groups of Buildings, ICOMOS, 1972;
- Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage, UNESCO, 1972;
- Recommendation Concerning the Safeguarding and Contemporary Role of Historic Areas, UNESCO, 1976;
- Charter for the Conservation of Historic Towns and Urban Areas, ICOMOS, 1987;
- Charter on the Preservation of Historic Gardens, ICOMOS, 1982;
- Guidelines for Education and Training in the Conservation of Monuments, Ensembles and Sites, ICOMOS, 1993;
- *Nara Document on Authenticity*, Japan and UNESCO, 1994;
- Charter on the Protection and Management of Underwater Cultural Heritage, ICOMOS, 1996;
- Principles for the Recording of Monuments, Groups of Buildings and Sites, ICOMOS, 1996;
- Principles for the Preservation of Historic Timber Buildings, ICOMOS, 1999;
- Charter on the Built Vernacular Heritage, ICOMOS, 2000;
- Convention on the Protection of the Underwater Cultural Heritage, UNESCO, 2001.

Interpretation at International Level

One of the main concerns of these guidelines was defining and establishing the scope of heritage and common definitions. Since the Venice Charter 1964, the scope of heritage has broadened from a concern for physical heritage such as historic monuments

and buildings to groups of buildings, historic urban and rural centres, historic gardens and to non-physical heritage including environments, social factors and, lately, intangible values. UNESCO and ICOMOS have been in the forefront in defining common terminology and scope of heritage since 1965. The term 'historic monument' in Article 1 of the Venice Charter 1964, 'not only the single architectural work but also the urban or rural setting', was not defined clearly enough. The Charter did not address the question of what constitutes an historic monument nor did it discuss the characteristics of urban and rural settings and the definition of sites. Therefore, in 1965 during the Constitutive Assembly of ICOMOS,[2] the scope of heritage was redefined. Heritage was then defined as monuments and sites:

> Article 3:1
> The term *monument* shall include all real property, … whether they contain buildings or not, having archaeological, architectural, historic or ethnographical interest and may include besides the furnishing preserved within them
>
> The term *site* shall be defined as a group of elements, either natural or man-made, or combinations of the two, which it is in the public interest to conserve.

To 'define their bearings' (as described by the Reporter of the Constitutive Assembly Meeting 1965) and to avoid overlapping of expertise between ICOMOS and the International Council of Museums (ICOM), it was made clear in Article 3c that archaeological collections, all movable cultural properties as part of museum collections, and open air museums were excluded from these definitions. This was to respect the expertise of ICOM and to differentiate between those who should be responsible for 'architectural heritage' and those who concern themselves with 'museum collections'.

In 1968, at the 15th session of the General Assembly in Paris, UNESCO adopted the Recommendation Concerning the Preservation of Cultural Property Endangered by Public or Private Works,[3] which, among other things, sought to define the scope of heritage. The definition of heritage as 'monuments' and 'sites' established earlier by ICOMOS in 1965 was not taken by the General Assembly as a whole; instead, it redefined the term cultural property introduced at The Hague Convention 1954.[4] Cultural property was regrouped and defined in 1968 as movable and immovable. Movable cultural property was referred to as 'museum collections' and immovable cultural property was referred to as 'architectural heritage'. Immovable cultural property was defined to include not only historic sites and features but, more importantly, it recognised the need to include groups of traditional structures and historic quarters in urban and rural areas:

> Article 1a
> archaeological and historic or scientific sites, structures or other features of historic, scientific, artistic or architectural value, whether religious or secular, including groups of traditional structures, historic quarters in urban or rural built-up areas and the ethnological structures of previous cultures still extant in valid form. It applies to such immovable constituting ruins existing above the earth as well as to archaeological or historical remains found within the earth. The term cultural property also includes the setting of such property

Thus, by the end of the 1960s the scope of heritage defined by the Venice Charter 1964 as historic monuments was interpreted somewhat differently by UNESCO and ICOMOS. Even though both organisations agreed in principle that heritage was no longer confined to historic monuments and buildings and should be extended to include groups of buildings and historic quarters, the terminology used was different; while UNESCO defined heritage as 'cultural property', ICOMOS defined heritage as 'monuments and sites'.

In 1972, this differing terminology, and the scope of architectural heritage, was reconciled at the UNESCO Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage, otherwise known as the World Heritage Convention 1972.[5] The UNESCO Convention regarded heritage as both cultural heritage as well as natural heritage, and UNESCO's earlier definition of movable and immovable cultural property was dropped. The definition of monuments and sites as mentioned in the ICOMOS statutes adopted in 1965 was rephrased and a third category—groups of buildings—was introduced. Cultural heritage was now defined to include monuments, groups of buildings and sites. This was seen as a clear move to ensure that groups of buildings and urban settings were being protected. Cultural heritage was defined by UNESCO in 1972 as:

> Article 1:1
> *monuments*: architectural works, works of monumental sculpture and painting, elements or structures of an archaeological nature, inscriptions, cave dwellings and combinations of features, which are of outstanding universal value from the point of view of history, art or science;
>
> *groups of buildings*: groups of separate or connected buildings which, because of their architecture, their homogeneity or their place in the landscape, are of outstanding universal value from the point of view of history, art or science;
>
> *sites*: works of man or the combined works of nature and of man, and areas including archaeological sites which are of outstanding universal value from the historical, aesthetic, ethnological or anthropological points of view.

Later, in its revised statute in 1978,[6] ICOMOS maintained the two broad categories of cultural property—monument and site—but added the 'group of buildings' as the third to clearly spell out urban and rural context and to be the same as those defined by UNESCO:

> Article 3b
> group of buildings: shall include all groups of separate or connected buildings and their surroundings, whether urban or rural, which, because of their architecture, their homogeneity or their place in the landscape, are of value from the historical, artistic, scientific, social or ethnological point of view

UNESCO terminology has remained unaltered to the present day. However, for the purpose of inscribing heritage on the World Heritage List the terminology was shifted from 'Cultural Heritage' to 'Cultural Properties' and 'Natural Heritage' to 'Natural Properties'.[7]

In 1975 and 1979, respectively, the scope of heritage was again broadened to include historic gardens, landscape and environment in Europe[8] and Australia,[9] but technically

this scope is not applicable in other countries. It was realised that the previous preservation and restoration projects were focused only on the protection of monuments and not the surroundings but that any changes or damage to the surroundings will affect the protection of monuments.

> Amsterdam Declaration[10]
> It is known that historical continuity must be preserved in the environment if we are to maintain or create surroundings which enable individuals to find their identity and feel secure despite abrupt changes.

This prompted the International Committee for Historic Gardens of ICOMOS to formulate an international charter that focused specifically on the conservation of historic gardens around the world. The Florence Charter on Historic Gardens[11] was adopted on the 15 December 1982. The Charter considered historic gardens as being both small and large parks, whether formal or landscaped, and whether or not associated with a building (Article 6). It considered historic gardens as having significance to the public from the historical or artistic point of view and therefore it was possible to classify these as monuments as defined by the ICOMOS statute of 1978. Of course, because gardens are primarily vegetal and subject to decay and regeneration, they were classified as living monuments that required special rules of protection. This has been the concern of the Florence Charter 1982.

Similarly, the broadening concern that heritage should also include social factors of historical towns was mentioned in the Amsterdam Declaration in 1975. The ICOMOS Charter for the Conservation of Historic Towns and Urban Areas, commonly known as the Washington Charter 1987,[12] emphasised the need to preserve the historic character of towns, including natural and man-made environment and the various functions that the towns have acquired over time. This is in recognition that 'all urban communities, whether they have developed gradually over time or have been created deliberately, are an expression of the diversity of societies throughout history' (Article 1:1).

Interpretation at National and Regional Levels

During the late 1970s and the 1980s the focus of international charters, recommendations, and resolutions was more towards the refinement of principles at national and regional levels. The need to formulate specific national principles had already been recognised by the Venice Charter 1964 in its preamble:

> It is essential that the principles guiding the preservation and restoration of ancient buildings should be agreed and laid down on an international basis, with each country being responsible for applying the plan within the framework of its own culture and traditions.

In Europe, the Council of Europe led the world by formulating and adopting regional charters that deal specifically with the situation of European countries—the European Charter of the Architectural Heritage and the Amsterdam Declaration were adopted in Amsterdam in 1975. Both discussed the broadening concept of architectural heritage

and the strategy of implementation, the concept of integrated conservation and in particular the roles of authorities in managing architectural heritage. The Amsterdam Declaration 1975 extended the scope of European architectural heritage from the earlier concern only for individual buildings to groups of buildings and their surroundings, old quarters, and areas of towns and villages of historic or cultural interest, also to include historic parks and gardens, the traditional environment and contemporary buildings; the latter—buildings of today—will be the heritage of tomorrow. It also emphasised the need to maintain the continuity of existing social and physical characteristics, both in urban and rural communities and the need to integrate social factors, such as social functions and economic realities, with the policy of architectural heritage and town planning.

The initiative taken by the Council of Europe to formulate common charters among various European countries was soon followed by other developed countries around the world. In Australia, Australia ICOMOS drafted and adopted the Australian ICOMOS charter for the Conservation of Places of Cultural Significance, commonly known as the Burra Charter of 1979, focusing on three aspects: conservation principles, conservation processes and conservation practice. The scope of heritage generally remained the same as that introduced by the Council of Europe in 1975, but the Burra Charter introduced three new terms:

- *place*, referring to site, area, building or other work, group of buildings or other works together with pertinent contents and surroundings;
- *cultural significance*, referring to aesthetic, historic, scientific or social value;
- *fabric*, meaning all the physical material of the place.

The Burra Charter 1979 was later amended in 1981, 1988 and 1999 to reflect the current concern of heritage and conservation in Australia, including conservation of intangible values. It recognises social and aesthetic values as part of cultural significance, as well as intangible values or intangible cultural heritage referred to by UNESCO as an integral aspect of heritage significance. The importance of intangible values as part of heritage was emphasised by UNESCO when it adopted a convention in 2003[13] that helped to protect intangible cultural heritage, which was defined as:

> Article 2 (Definitions)
> practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, skills, instruments, objects, artefacts and cultural spaces associated with communities, groups and individuals.

In Canada, a specific charter for the province of Quebec was drafted by ICOMOS Canada in 1982 due to the threat of its heritage from modernisation and the pursuit of new lifestyles. The Charter for the Preservation of Quebec's Heritage[14] defined the scope of Quebec's heritage in three major entities: material culture (cultural properties), which represents 'the whole of the material environment in which we live', to include buildings, archaeological and ethnographical objects, furniture and art objects to name a few; geographic environment, such as nature—coast, mountain and plain landscapes—natural sites and panoramic value; and human environments having their own culture, customs and traditions.

In New Zealand, the New Zealand National Committee of the ICOMOS drafted and adopted a specific conservation charter for New Zealand, known as the Charter for the Conservation of Places of Cultural Heritage Value,[15] at its annual meeting on 4 October 1992. The Charter adopted the terminology of 'place' as introduced by the Burra Charter but broadened its scope to include 'land covered by water, and the airspace forming the spatial context to such land' and 'any body of water, whether fresh or seawater, that forms part of the historical and cultural heritage of New Zealand' (Article 22:5).

In China, ICOMOS China adopted Principles for the Conservation of Heritage Sites in China[16] 2000, which was drawn up in collaboration with the Getty Conservation Institute and the Australian Heritage Commission. It provides professional guidelines for heritage conservation and also specifies criteria for the evaluation of all conservation work in the country. Unlike the Australia and New Zealand Charters that define their heritage as place, the Chinese define theirs simply as heritage sites, which are accepted as: 'the immovable physical remains that were created during the history of humankind and that have significance' (Article 1:1); amongst others, these include archaeological sites and ruins, tombs, traditional architecture, cave temples and historic villages and towns.

In the countries of Southeast Asia, to date there have been no charters, guidelines or recommendations developed and adopted either by ICOMOS or UNESCO. However, the Foreign Ministers of these countries, who met on 25 July 2000, adopted the ASEAN Declaration on Cultural Heritage[17] that defines cultural heritage as 'structures and artefacts, sites and human habitats, oral or folk heritage, written heritage, and popular cultural heritage'. Similar to other countries, the scope of heritage in Southeast Asia, in general, now covers both tangible and intangible heritage, but the broader definitions are very different from those used by UNESCO or ICOMOS, which adopted the terms monument, group of buildings and site; or with neighbouring countries in the Asia-Pacific region that define 'place' as their heritage. The degree of refinement of the scope and definitions at national levels in Southeast Asia varies. In Vietnam, for example, heritage is defined as tangible and intangible cultural heritages, and in the Philippines, heritage is now defined as cultural properties, both movable and immovable.

By the end of the 20th century, the scope of heritage, in general, was agreed internationally to include *tangible* and *intangible heritage* as well as *environments*. To better inform the international communities, in 1999 UNESCO clarified the scope of tangible values as cultural properties to include monuments, groups of buildings and site (Article 23:5) and the scope of environments as natural properties (Article 43:10); and adopted the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage (UNESCO, 2003), which defines 'intangible cultural heritage' as:

> (Article 2:2)
> The practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, skills—as well as the instruments, objects, artefacts and cultural spaces associated therewith—that communities, groups and, in some cases, individuals recognise as part of their cultural heritage. This intangible cultural heritage, transmitted from generation to generation, is constantly

> recreated by communities and groups in response to their environments, their interaction with nature and their history, and provides them with a sense of identity and continuity, thus promoting respect for cultural diversity and human creativity.

This includes oral traditions and expressions, language, performing arts, social practices, rituals, festive events and traditional craftsmanship.

Summary

For the last 40 years, since the adoption of the Venice Charter in 1964, there have been numerous conservation guidelines in the form of charters, recommendations, principles, and recommendations that, among others, have carefully defined the scope of heritage and its broader definitions. The scope has broadened considerably from mere concern for individual buildings and sites to include groups of buildings, historical areas, towns, environments, social factors and, lately, intangible heritage. While the scope of heritage has broadened to include environment and intangible values, and has received agreement from the international communities, the finer terminology of 'heritage' has not been streamlined or standardised, and thus no uniformity exists between countries. While both UNESCO and ICOMOS agreed in principle that the scope of heritage should cover both cultural and natural heritage, the term 'cultural heritage', which includes monuments, groups of buildings and sites, has not been followed at national levels. Australia refers to its heritage as 'place, cultural significance and fabric', Canada refers to 'material culture, geographic environments and human environments', New Zealand to 'place', and China to 'immovable physical remains', to name a few. Even though it is a prerogative of every country to formulate its own terminology and interpretation of heritage, some common terms and terminology should be followed. It is recommended that UNESCO and ICOMOS lead the intellectual discussions on common terms, scope and terminology; and international countries adopt them at national level.

Notes

[1] Congress of Architects and Technicians of Historic Monuments (CATHM), the Venice Charter 1964.
[2] ICOMOS, Constitutive Assembly, 1965.
[3] UNESCO, 15th Session of the General Conference, 1968.
[4] UNESCO, The Hague Convention, 1954.
[5] UNESCO, the World Heritage Convention, 1972.
[6] ICOMOS, ICOMOS Statutes, 1978.
[7] UNESCO, Operational Guidelines, 1999.
[8] Council of Europe, European Charter of the Architectural Heritage 1975.
[9] ICOMOS Australia, the Burra Charter 1979.
[10] Council of Europe, Amsterdam Declaration, 1975, 2.
[11] ICOMOS, the Florence Charter 1982.
[12] ICOMOS, the Washington Charter 1987.
[13] UNESCO, 32nd Session of the General Conference, 2003.
[14] ICOMOS Canada, Quebec Charter 1982.

[15] ICOMOS New Zealand, New Zealand Charter 1992.
[16] ICOMOS China, Principle for Conservation, 2000.
[17] ASEAN, ASEAN Declaration, 2000.

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