

The Declaration of San Antonio (1996)

We, the presidents, delegates and members of the ICOMOS National Committees of the Americas, met in San Antonio, Texas, United States of America, from the 27th to the 30th of March, 1996, at the InterAmerican Symposium on Authenticity in the Conservation and Management of the Cultural Heritage to discuss the meaning of authenticity in preservation in the Americas. We did so in response to the call issued by the Secretary General of ICOMOS for regional participation in the international debate on the subject.

A. BACKGROUND

For the past twelve months, members of the ICOMOS National Committees of the Americas have studied, read and discussed the documents produced in 1994 by the meetings of specialists on authenticity in Bergen, Norway, and Nara, Japan, as well as other pertinent documents. In preparation for the assembly in San Antonio, each National Committee prepared and submitted a National Position Paper that summarized the results of its own national or regional findings.

B. CONSIDERATIONS AND ANALYSIS

Having discussed the nature, definition, proofs, and management of authenticity in relation to the architectural, urban, archaeological and cultural landscape heritage of the Americas in an assembly that was open to members of all the ICOMOS National Committees of the Americas and to preservation organizations from the regions, we issue the following summary of our findings and recommendations:

1. AUTHENTICITY AND IDENTITY

The authenticity of our cultural heritage is directly related to our cultural identity. The cultures and the heritage of the Americas are distinct from those of other continents because of their unique development and influences. Our languages, our societal structures, our economic means, and our spiritual beliefs vary within our continent, and yet, there are strong common threads that unify the Americas. Among these is our autochthonous heritage, which has not been entirely destroyed in spite of the violence of the Conquest Era and a persistent process of acculturation; the heritage from the European colonizers and the African slavery that together have helped build our nations; and finally, the more recent contribution of European and Asian immigrants who came searching for a dream of freedom and helped to consolidate it. All these groups have contributed to the rich and syncretic pluriculturalism that makes up our dynamic continental identity.

Because cultural identity is at the core of community and national life, it is the foundation of our cultural heritage and its conservation. Within the cultural diversity of the Americas, groups with separate identities co-exist in the same space and time and at times across space and time, sharing cultural manifestations, but often assigning different values to them. No nation in the Americas has a single national identity; our diversity makes up the sum of our national identities.

The authenticity of our cultural resources lies in the identification, evaluation and interpretation of their true values as perceived by our ancestors in the past and by ourselves now as an evolving and diverse community. As such, the Americas must recognize the values of the majorities and the minorities without imposing a hierarchical predominance of any one culture and its values over those of others.

The comprehensive cultural value of our heritage can be understood only through an objective study of history, the material elements inherent in the tangible heritage, and a deep understanding of the intangible traditions associated with the tangible patrimony.

When taking into account the value of heritage sites as related to cultural identity, the Americas face the global problem of cultural homogenization, which tends to dilute and erase local values in favor of those that are being advanced universally, often as stereotyped illusions with commercial ends. This weakens the role of heritage sites. While we accept the importance of traditional values as an instrument in ethnic and national identity, we reject their use to promote exacerbated nationalism and other conflicting attitudes that would lead our continent away from mutual respect and a permanent peace.

2. AUTHENTICITY AND HISTORY

An understanding of the history and significance of a site over time are crucial elements in the identification of its authenticity. The understanding of the authenticity of a heritage site depends on a comprehensive assessment of the significance of the site by those who are associated with it or who claim it as part of their history. For this reason, it is important to understand the origins and evolution of the site as well as the values associated with it. Variations in the meaning and values of a site may at times be in conflict, and while that conflict needs to be mediated, it may, in fact, enrich the value of the heritage site by being the point of convergence of the values of various groups. The history of a site should not be manipulated to enhance the dominant values of certain groups over those of others.

3. AUTHENTICITY AND MATERIALS

The material fabric of a cultural site can be a principal component of its authenticity. As emphasized in Article 9 of the Venice Charter, the presence of ancient and original elements is part of the basic nature of a heritage site. The Charter also indicates that the material elements of our tangible cultural heritage are bearers of important information about our past and our identity. Those messages include information about a site's original creation as well as the layered messages that resulted from the interaction between the resource and new and diverse cultural circumstances. For these reasons, those materials and their setting need to be identified, evaluated and protected. In the case of cultural landscapes, the importance of material fabric must be weighed along with the immaterial distinctive character and components of the site.

Over time, heritage sites have come to possess a testimonial value -- which may be aesthetic, historic or otherwise -- that is readily evident to most of society. In addition to the testimonial value, there are less evident documentary values that

require an understanding of the historic fabric in order to identify their meaning and their message. Since the documentary value responds to evolving questions posed by the community over time, it is important that the material evidence, defined in terms of design, materials, manufacture, location, and context be preserved in order to retain its ability to continue to manifest and convey those concealed values to present and future generations.

The degree to which documented missing elements are replaced as part of restoration treatments varies within the Americas in accordance to the cultural characteristics of each country. Some national policies indicate that what is lost can only be part of our memory and not of our heritage. Elsewhere, policies encourage the replacement of fully documented elements in facsimile form in order to re-establish the site's full significance. Nevertheless, we emphasize that only the historic fabric is authentic, and interpretations achieved through restoration are not; they can only authentically represent the meaning of a site as understood in a given moment. Furthermore, we universally reject the reliance on conjecture or hypotheses for restoration.

Apart from the above, there are important sectors of our patrimony that are built of perishable materials that require periodic replacement in accordance with traditional crafts to ensure continued use. Similarly, there are heritage sites built of durable materials but that are subject to damage caused by periodic natural catastrophes, such as earthquakes, floods and hurricanes. In these cases, we also assert the validity of using traditional techniques for their repair, especially when those techniques are still in use in the region, or when more sophisticated approaches would be economically prohibitive.

We recognize that in certain types of heritage sites, such as cultural landscapes, the conservation of overall character and traditions, such as patterns, forms and spiritual value, may be more important than the conservation of the physical features of the site, and as such, may take precedence. Therefore, authenticity is a concept much larger than material integrity and the two concepts must not be assumed to be equivalent or consubstantial.

4. AUTHENTICITY AND SOCIAL VALUE

Beyond the material evidence, heritage sites can carry a deep spiritual message that sustains communal life, linking it to the ancestral past. This spiritual meaning is manifested through customs and traditions such as settlement patterns, land use practices, and religious beliefs. The role of these intangibles is an inherent part of the cultural heritage, and as such, their link to the meaning of the tangible elements of the sites must be carefully identified, evaluated, protected and interpreted.

The goal of preserving memory and its cultural manifestations must be approached by aiming to enrich human spirituality, beyond the material aspect. Historic research and surveys of the physical fabric are not enough to identify the full significance of a heritage site, since only the concerned communities that have a

stake in the site can contribute to the understanding and expression of the deeper values of the site as an anchor to their cultural identity.

In cultural landscapes, including urban areas, the process of identifying and protecting social value is complex because so many separate interest groups may be involved. In some cases, this situation is further complicated because the traditional indigenous groups that once protected and developed the sites are now adopting new and at times conflicting values that spring from the market economy, and from their desire for more social and economic integration in the national life. We recognize that sustainable development may be a necessity for those who inhabit cultural landscapes, and that a process for mediation must be developed to address the dynamic nature of these sites so that all values may be properly taken into account. We also recognize that in some cases, there may be a hierarchy of values that is related to the stake of some groups in a site.

5. AUTHENTICITY IN DYNAMIC AND STATIC SITES

The heritage of the Americas includes dynamic cultural sites that continue to be actively used by society, as well as static sites such as archaeological sites no longer used by the descendants of their builders. These two types of sites have differing natures; and their conservation needs, the determination of their authenticity, and their interpretation vary according to their character.

Dynamic cultural sites, such as historic cities and landscapes, may be considered to be the product of many authors over a long period of time whose process of creation often continues today. This constant adaptation to human need can actively contribute to maintaining the continuum among the past, present and future life of our communities. Through them our traditions are maintained as they evolve to respond to the needs of society. This evolution is normal and forms an intrinsic part of our heritage. Some physical changes associated with maintaining the traditional patterns of communal use of the heritage site do not necessarily diminish its significance and may actually enhance it. Therefore, such material changes may be acceptable as part of on-going evolution.

Static cultural sites include those valued as the concluded work of a single author or group of authors and whose original or early message has not been transformed. They are appreciated for their aesthetic value, or for their significance in commemorating persons and events important in the history of the community, the nation, or the world. In these sites, which are often recognized as monumental structures, the physical fabric requires the highest level of conservation in order to limit alterations to their character.

Another type of site that may be static is the archaeological site whose active communal and social purpose have faded or even ceased. For a variety of reasons, the descendants of the original creators and traditional inhabitants have lost their direct link to the physical fabric of the site, thereby also weakening their ability to perceive and interpret the site's meaning and value. Because the pre-European cultures of the Americas lacked writing, the most direct link to that past lies in the

material evidence of the archaeological sites, with the added complication that the information that they offer is incomplete and at times random. The authenticity of archaeological sites is non-renewable. It resides in its material elements and their context, that is, the relationship of the structures and objects among themselves and with the physical surroundings. Authenticity can be destroyed when the context of the site is not properly documented, when layers are eliminated to reach deeper ones, when total excavation is undertaken and when the findings are not rigorously and broadly disseminated. For these reasons, witnesses of the original stratigraphy must be maintained so that future generations may analyze them with more sophisticated techniques than those in existence today.

Only through study, publication and research of the physical evidence can these sites and their objects once again manifest their values and re-establish their links to our present cultural identity. However, the interpretation of the sites can authentically reflect only fluctuating interests and values, and in itself, interpretation is not inherently authentic, only honest and objective. For these reasons, the intactness of the physical evidence in its entirety demands the most thorough documentation, protection and conservation so that objectivity of interpretation may respond to new information derived from that fabric.

Regardless of the type of site, contemporary treatments must rescue the character of all cultural resources without transforming their essence and balance. New elements must be harmonious with the character of the whole.

6. AUTHENTICITY AND STEWARDSHIP

The heritage of the Americas is characterized by very heterogeneous patterns of ownership and stewardship. While many sites are properly protected by their stewards, at times some sites are under the jurisdiction of local authorities that lack the ability to determine properly the comprehensive value of the sites or the appropriate treatments for their conservation. Other times, the original inhabitants who created and cared for a cultural site have been replaced by new populations that have little or no cultural affinity for the site and place little or no value in it, leading to its abandonment and decay. This situation urgently demands that the proper national and local authorities and the present owners, stewards and inhabitants be made fully aware of the value that other majority and minority sectors of the population may have for the site. Both the communities and the constituted authorities must be provided the means for the correct knowledge and evaluation of the heritage, its protection and conservation, and the promotion of its artistic and spiritual enjoyment, as well as its educational use.

7. AUTHENTICITY AND ECONOMICS

The authenticity of heritage sites lies intrinsically in their physical fabric, and extrinsically on the values assigned to them by those communities who have a stake in them. Tourists constitute one of those groups that values the site and has an interest in its meaning and conservation.

Since cultural tourism is often a substantial source of revenue for local and national economies, its development is acceptable, as originally formulated in the Norms of

Quito. Nevertheless, the limited values that tourists may place on a site and the economic concerns for tourism revenue cannot be allowed to be the overriding criterion in a site's conservation and interpretation. This is especially true when the authenticity of fabric and its context, and of the site's broader values and message are altered, diminished, or threatened.

In the Americas, the authenticity of many archaeological sites has been compromised through reconstructions. In spite of their educational value, reconstructions aimed to promote tourism reduce the authenticity of such sites by involving new hands, new materials and new criteria, and by altering the appearance of the site.

Furthermore, within the framework of economic development, the problem of permanently poor populations remains a critical factor in the urban cores of many historic cities of the Americas. Bringing about an awareness of the cultural value of the urban heritage on the part of these poor sectors cannot be achieved without a comprehensive approach to solve their marked material and social marginality.

C. RECOMMENDATIONS

Given all of the above considerations, we the Presidents of the ICOMOS National Committees of the Americas hereby offer for discussion at the General Assembly in Sofia the following general recommendations as well as the specific discussion group recommendations that emerged from the extensive discussions held in San Antonio by the participants in the InterAmerican Symposium on Authenticity in the Conservation and Management of the Cultural Heritage. Furthermore, we recognize and commend the Nara Document as a valuable instrument for discussion, but find it incomplete and, therefore, endorse the appended commentaries on the Nara Document based on the needs we have identified relating to the heritage of the Americas:

1. GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS:

- a. That our appreciation be conveyed to the members of US/ICOMOS, to the Getty Conservation Institute and the San Antonio Conservation Society for organizing and sponsoring the InterAmerican Symposium on Authenticity, and that the authorities of the City of San Antonio, Texas, be recognized for their hospitality during our meeting and for their accomplishments in preserving the heritage of this beautiful historic city.
- b. That a process be established that will help to define and protect authenticity in the material legacies of our diverse cultural heritage, and that will lead to the recognition of a broad range of significant resources through the comprehensive and specific evaluation of cultural value, the administrative context, and the history of the site. The Burra Charter and its operational guidelines may serve as a model for this process. Such a process should include management mechanisms that will ensure the involvement of all concerned groups. Individual experts representative of a broad range of disciplines and interests, all relevant groups in the process and other interested or affected parties must be included in the management process of determination of significance and treatments in a heritage site.

- c. That further consideration be given to the proofs of authenticity so that indicators may be identified for such a determination in a way that all significant values in the site may be set forth. The following are some examples of indicators:
 - i. **Reflection of the true value.** That is, whether the resource remains in the condition of its creation and reflects all its significant history.
 - ii. **Integrity.** That is, whether the site is fragmented; how much is missing, and what are the recent additions.
 - iii. **Context.** That is, whether the context and/or the environment correspond to the original or other periods of significance; and whether they enhance or diminish the significance.
 - iv. **Identity.** That is, whether the local population identify themselves with the site, and whose identity the site reflects.
 - v. **Use and function.** That is, the traditional patterns of use that have characterized the site.
 - d. That given the comprehensive nature of the cultural heritage, the existing principles contained in all pertinent charters and declarations be consolidated as part of the development of a comprehensive approach and guideline to the practice of heritage conservation. These should include the Venice Charter, the 1965 UNESCO Archaeological Guidelines, the Burra Charter, the Declaration of Oaxaca, the Florence Charter, the Washington Charter, the Nara Document, the Charter of Brasilia, this Declaration of San Antonio, etc.
2. RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE ARCHITECTURE AND URBANISM GROUP
- a. That proper recognition be given to the values inherent in the cultural diversity of our historic urban centers.
 - b. That programs be established to develop a greater awareness among the many cultural groups of their multiplicity of values.
 - c. That through additional awareness and educational programs, governmental authorities and stewardship groups be made aware of the role of social and cultural values in protecting the authenticity of buildings and sites.
 - d. That flexible and open processes for consultation and mediation be instituted at the local level in order to identify communal values and other aspects of cultural significance in historic urban districts.
 - e. Since historic urban districts and towns are a type of cultural landscape, that many of the recommendations issued by the Cultural Landscapes Group also be applied to this sector of the heritage.
3. RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES GROUP
- a. That more attention be paid to authenticity in archaeological sites on the part of ICOMOS. Perhaps because of the membership composition of ICOMOS, there has not been enough concern for this heritage sector in the Americas.
 - b. That more analysis be dedicated to the relationship authenticity might have to such activities as stabilization, consolidation, construction of protective shelters, etc.
 - c. That descriptive and accurate documentation be an absolute requirement in all archaeological work. As sites are excavated, they are depleted of information, like books whose pages disappear. Interpretation is not

controllable, but the record is. The archaeological record must be truthful and reliable -- in other words, authentic, objective and rigorous.

- d. That all interventions and excavations in archaeological sites always be accompanied by implementation of a conservation and permanent protection plan.
 - e. That the authenticity of archaeological evidence be given proper protection when sites are threatened by urban encroachment or by civil works, such as road construction.
 - f. That authenticity be protected prior to artificial flooding and the construction of dams through the exhaustive documentation of the area, with appropriate rescue techniques for the archaeological evidence, and followed by the publication of the results.
 - g. That if excavated sites are not properly attended to and managed, conservation measures -- such as site re-burial -- must be considered to ensure that some level of authenticity is maintained through the ages.
 - h. That a large part of the authenticity of an archaeological site resides in the undisturbed buried archaeological remains of the fill, and as such, should be minimally excavated by archaeologists, only to the extent necessary to determine the significance of the site.
 - i. That some archaeological sites are still held to be sacred by the descendants of the creators of the site, and as such, should be minimally disturbed, or not disturbed at all, by archaeologists or development.
4. RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE CULTURAL LANDSCAPES GROUP
- a. That processes of negotiation be established to mediate among the different interests and values of the many groups who own or live in cultural landscapes.
 - b. Since cultural landscapes are complex and dynamic, that the process of determining and protecting authenticity be sufficiently flexible to incorporate this dynamic quality.
 - c. That the concept of sustainable development and its relationship to the management of cultural landscapes be defined in order to include economic, social, spiritual and cultural concerns.
 - d. That the conservation of cultural landscapes seek a balance between the significant natural and cultural resources.
 - e. That the needs and values of the local communities be taken into consideration when the future of cultural landscapes is being determined.
 - f. That further work be done on appropriate legislation and governmental planning methodologies to protect the values associated with cultural landscapes.
 - g. Since in conserving the authenticity of cultural landscapes the overall character and traditions, such as patterns, forms, land use and spiritual value of the site may take precedence over material and design aspects, that a clear relationship between values and the proof of authenticity be established.
 - h. That expert multi-disciplinary assessments become a requirement for the determination of authenticity in cultural landscapes, and that such expert groups include social scientists who can accurately articulate the values of the local communities.

- i. That the authenticity of cultural landscapes be protected prior to major changes in land use and to the construction of large public and private projects, by requiring responsible authorities and financing organizations to undertake environmental impact studies that will lead to the mitigation of negative impacts upon the landscape and the traditional values associated with these sites.
5. RECOMMENDATIONS REGARDING THE NARA DOCUMENT
- That the attached commentaries on the Nara Document be considered in all international documents and guidelines as a reflection of the definition, proof and protection of the authenticity of the Cultural Heritage of the Americas.

**ATTACHMENT TO
THE DECLARATION OF SAN ANTONIO**

COMMENTARY ON THE NARA DOCUMENT

Resulting from discussions among the participants in the InterAmerican Symposium on Authenticity in the Conservation and Management of the Cultural Heritage, organized by US/ICOMOS, The Getty Conservation Institute and the San Antonio Conservation Society: San Antonio, Texas, March 27-30, 1996.

First and foremost, the Symposium participants extend their congratulations to the drafting committee of the Nara Document for this important and timely contribution to the field of cultural heritage protection. We also recognize that this Document was discussed and approved by the participants in the Nara Document and that, as such, it is not subject to change. However, because it has been made available to the global conservation community for study and discussion, it is important that its relevance to the cultural heritage of the Americas be analyzed. It is in that spirit that these comments are offered:

INTRODUCTION

The Preface to the Nara Document states,

"The experts considered that an expanded dialogue in different regions of the world and among specialist groups concerned with the diversity of cultural heritage was essential to further refine the concept and application of authenticity as it relates to cultural heritage. Such on-going dialogue will be encouraged by ICOMOS, ICCROM, and the World Heritage Centre, and will be brought to the Committee's attention as appropriate."

In keeping with this recommendation, US/ICOMOS took on the challenge to organize a meeting of presidents, delegates and members of the ICOMOS committees from the Americas to assemble in San Antonio, Texas, to consider the definitions and applicability of authenticity to the conservation and management of heritage in their regions. One of the tasks taken up by the group was a careful review of the articles of the Nara Document, for the purpose of examining whether the American point of view is fully represented in the document.

It was acknowledged by all present that the Nara Document represents considerable diplomatic and substantive work on the part of the individuals involved in its development. The participants in the San Antonio symposium concur with the Nara group that the subject is central to preservation work around the world, and its closer definition and more thorough understanding is of profound and timely importance to the professional community. It was also believed that while the Nara Document is focused on the needs for implementing the World Heritage Convention, by its very nature, the Document will find a broader application. Therefore, some of our comments may address its broader sense. While the Nara Document will certainly find a place in the interpretation of the World Heritage Convention and to the applications of other guidelines, it was felt by the group in San Antonio that several substantive issues that surfaced could usefully be brought forward to ICOMOS in the forum of the ICOMOS General Assembly in Sofia, Bulgaria, in October 1996 and to the World Heritage Committee.

DISCUSSION OF THE DOCUMENT

In general, the group believes that the Nara Document is a good articulate discussion of complex issues, in spite of the difficulty in closely tracking the English and French versions. In several articles [Articles 6, 12, and 13], the English text appears weak in comparison to the French, and the meaning of the two texts does not correspond exactly, making it difficult to determine which meaning reflects the real intention of the authors. The comments on this point were made with the understanding that the document had been produced under challenging time pressures and that some language revisions are still under way.

More specifically, six of the articles were seen to present opportunities for further discussion within the context of the concerns of the ICOMOS National Committees of the Americas and the nature of our cultural heritage.

ARTICLE 1

The participants at the InterAmerican Symposium believes that in the Americas the concept of participation by the local community and stakeholders needs to be stronger than the text implies in order that they be involved in all processes from the beginning. By identifying the stages for such involvement, the Nara Document excludes the local community, for instance, from the identification process.

ARTICLE 4

The San Antonio group believes that in the Americas, and perhaps elsewhere, the use of the words "nationalism" and "minorities" are inappropriate, for they do not cover the rather common case in this hemisphere where a minority within a nation may be more influential and impose its cultural values over larger, even majority groups, all within a shared national identity.

Also, the concept was advanced that this article omits one important mechanism in the search for cultural identity in the Americas, which is the re-assignment of lost or new values for weakened cultural traditions and heritage, especially those associated with the native American patrimony.

ARTICLE 5

There was discussion in San Antonio as to whether this Article incorporates a very important characteristic of the Americas, which is the close coexistence of vastly differing cultural groups, including, in extreme cases, the close proximity of post-industrial, highly technical societies with nomadic tribes who live in close interaction with the natural environment. It was thought that this coexistence needs to be acknowledged and respected throughout the conservation process.

ARTICLE 8.

Responsibility for cultural heritage and the management of it belongs, in the first place, to the cultural community that generated it, and subsequently to that which cares for it. However, in addition to these responsibilities, adherence to the international charters and conventions developed for conservation of cultural heritage also obliges consideration of the principles and responsibilities flowing from them. Balancing its own requirements with those of other cultural communities is, for each community, highly desirable, provided achieving this balance does not undermine their fundamental cultural values.

The first sentence in this article,

It is important to underline a fundamental principle of UNESCO, to the effect that the cultural heritage of each is the cultural heritage of all.

reflects an important idea within the World Heritage context, but the group felt strongly that in a broader context the wording could easily lead to serious misinterpretation. First, the statement "*the cultural heritage of each is the cultural heritage of all*" could be used to support the idea that decisions over the heritage of a nation could rightfully be made by outside authorities. Unless the site or monument is on the World Heritage List, this was seen as an inappropriate possibility that undermined sovereignty. Second, at the other extreme, this statement could also be used to support the abdication of responsibility of a nation to care for its heritage when it should.

While the second sentence would appear to address that point, the current wording of the first sentence weakens its strength:

Responsibility for cultural heritage and the management of it belongs, in the first place to the cultural community that has generated it and subsequently, to that which cares for it.

The San Antonio group believes that where the community that created the heritage is still its steward or holds a stake in its survival, it should be responsible for its care. Where the heritage has passed into the common holding of a nation where it stands, the nation must take responsibility. Here again, the problem may lie in the translation.

The last sentence in Article 8,

Balancing their own requirements with those of other cultural communities is for each community highly desirable, provided achieving this balance does not undermine their fundamental cultural values.

is also problematic in its current wording, because the identification of "*fundamental cultural values*" is not possible or desirable in this context.

ARTICLE 10

It was thought that this text does not fully reflect the concerns of the Americas because it does not directly state that in the understanding of authenticity it is crucial to acknowledge the dynamic nature of cultural values, and that to gain such understanding static and inflexible criteria must be avoided.

ARTICLE 11

The participants believe that this Article lacks needed clarity and emphasis that could have been provided by a reiteration in its last sentence of the definition of what the cultural context constitutes:

a) that which created it; b) that to which it currently belongs; and c) the broader cultural context to the extent possible.