

OPENING SCIENTIFIC SYMPOSIUM NEW DELHI 2017

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Today we meet in the largest democracy of the world, and the symposium events and talks that we will share face squarely many of the central issues we face in heritage discourse globally. The impacts of global climate change, of terrorism and conflict, of migration and estrangement from cultural roots that had once held firm for generations.

In the days ahead we will hear much about the goals of sustainable development - principles which must receive our closest attention and implementation in our all professional practice.

We will hear papers about the role of heritage in building peace and reconciliation; with stories of hope and resilience; despair and reconstruction.

I'm looking to try to attend the sessions on digital empowerment which is impacting every aspect of heritage practice from documentation and scientific testing, to monitoring and archiving to see if digital technology can render decision-making, interpretation and conservation itself, more democratic.

But the fourth Symposium theme- the Culture Nature Journey, jointly coordinated by ICOMOS and IUCN and developed with a range of partners - is very tempting as well, with workshops, knowledge cafes as well as scholarly papers that will tempt us all. This theme experiments with a new form of ICOMOS conference- using an intensely interactive and engaging format to explore an approach to heritage based on the understanding that relationships between people and the natural environment have worked to shape both our physical environment and belief systems

As the Scientific Symposium Committee co-chair, when I reviewed hundreds of abstracts submitted for selection I was also looking for discourses responding to the challenge inherent in title of the symposium selected by ICOMOS India- **Heritage and Democracy**.

I think it's very timely that ICOMOS advance an exploration of the challenges to representative democracy of increasing civic disengagement we see worldwide , especially considering the context of instantaneous communication in which we live.

The Delhi Declaration, a draft of which has been circulated to all participants and robustly debated over the last few days represents part of that discourse, and I encourage everyone to consider this text and contribute to its evolution. The draft Declaration begins with the premise that:

Cultural Heritage and Democracy means a people-based approach – that the heritage is a fundamental right and responsibility of all and a starting-point for sustainable development and social engagement in today's fast changing world.

The cultural heritage of the world is our common inheritance, celebrated in the creation and endurance of UNESCO, under whose auspices ICOMOS was formed and thrives today in our complex, challenging world. We meet for this General Assembly of ICOMOS in one of the world's most populous and diverse nations – India, the world's largest democracy in which religious, social and ethnic diversity have been, and must be, welded together if the nation is to survive and prosper.

As democratic governance seeks to balance the rights of the minority with the will of the majority, so must democratic governments work to recognise, respect and have regard for the cultural heritage of all races and peoples, as it all contributes to our common inheritance. We all know this requires an unceasing commitment, dedication, and courage.

How might democracy be seen in the way we respond to the challenges of heritage conservation? What are the essentials of a democratic response to the idea of heritage?

- A freedom of celebration of the heritage values perceived in places
- Freedom, and the absence of constraint upon
 - the identification of places as being part of our heritage
 - the assessment and evaluation of the heritage significance we see to be embodied in heritage places
- Management of heritage free from discrimination
- Even handedness in the allocation of resources for conservation of places

Cultural heritage is a responsibility of all levels of government – local, regional, national/federal – as well as local people, communities, amenity societies and the international community in all its forms. The activities of a civil society and its cultural institutions are critical energisers and upholders of community will.

In an historic urban environment, the demands of corporate and government investment are insistent, the role of the people in the recognition and protection of places of cultural significance is all too often a contested space. This is an area in which ICOMOS has a very vested interest in developing its position.

These slides show a case in point of the changing Historic Urban Landscape from my home town: Sydney.

Last week, one of Sydney's finest examples of brutalist architecture was put on sale for \$A100 million by the state government. The sale of the Sirius building follows the government's decision NOT to include it on the State Heritage Register, leaving the site open to the threat of demolition.

The state of NSW has had Heritage legislation since the 1970s, with a State Heritage Register and protective statutory measures are also available at local level. But in October the NSW

government rejected the recommendation of its own expert advisers ,the state Heritage Council, to list the building on the State Heritage Register for a second time, having had its initial decision overturned in the courts.



Figure 1 The Sirius Building. Designed in 1978-9 by the NSW Housing Commission to rehouse residents being displaced by urban redevelopment in The Rocks Sydney, it has been refused state heritage listing Source: Author

The Minister for Housing has committed that the proceeds of the sale of Sirius will be used to create social housing elsewhere in Sydney, a worthy objective, but do these residents really need to move from the purpose built social housing building ? Or are the spectacular views of the Sydney Opera House and the sparkling harbour, the significant financial returns of sale and redevelopment outweighing the social and heritage values of its conservation?

Located in Sydney's The Rocks area, the Sirius building was designed by the government architect as public housing in the 1970s. It includes 79 apartments, containing between one and four bedrooms, and communal areas including a lounge and library. It was designed by architect Tao Gofers to become the homes of residents being displaced by urban redevelopment .

Sirius was built as the result of an agreement put in place to end a Green Ban, a celebrated and unique tool of civic action which arose in Australia in the 1970s when builder's unions withdrew their labor from redevelopment sites at the request of local communities seeking to save historic precincts.

This was the first cultural movement of its kind, and it eventually halted the then Liberal government redevelopment of the City and ushered in a Labor government which introduced Heritage legislation and commenced compiling a State Heritage Register.



Figure 3: A neon protest sign “SOS: Save Our Sirius” erected in the window of the last remaining resident of the Sirius building. Source: Author

The building is in excellent condition and was occupied until recently by many of those for whom it was built.

An active local conservation campaign, led by the Save Our Sirius Foundation has spent the last year fighting to protect the housing block. They raised AU\$50,000 crowdfunding and mounted a media and civic action campaign, enlisting public figures including Sydney's mayor Clover Moore, who tweeted: "*Literally every organisation charged with giving the NSW govt advice on heritage has argued for the protection of Sirius.*"



Figure2 An intensive social media campaign has bought new communities out to support the conservation of the Sirius building and protest against government policy. Architect Tao Goffers explains its history at one of the regular Friday public events, to explain the significance of the building. Source: Author

Less than 4 decades after the construction of the Sirius, once again a Builders Union Green Ban action has been called upon to support the conservation of the Sirius building

The Sirius was included in the 2018 World Monuments Watch list- one of 25 sites across the world in dire need of community understanding and active support

Save Our Sirius Foundation will no doubt continue its campaign.

Property Developers will now be looking at how the financial numbers stack up , with an option of retention and adaptive reuse within the existing building or considerably more floor space return in a new structure.

When Australia ICOMOS welcomes you all to Sydney for the next ICOMOS general Assembly in 2020, it's my fervent hope that we will take you all to see this remarkable building, but as the chairman of the Save our Sirius Foundation says

Democracy is not a passive thing. Its precious. It's ours. We need to fight for it. If we don't we will get a version of democracy we don't like, and we will lose a bit of ourselves in the process. Democracy is something we all need to be involved in...i

As you attend the fantastic program of events and activities in the Delhi scientific symposium ahead, please reflect upon this case, and the many others you will hear about.

I sincerely thank the committed team of scientific committee advisers who have curated the symposium program, the chairs and rapporteurs who will support the conference flow, the volunteers and participants who have contributed much time and effort, none more so than my tireless co- chair Nupur Prothi Khanna.

We hope this event will challenge, engage and equip everyone to remember the 19th General Assembly in Delhi as one in which new professional paths and networks were opened, new practices examined and fresh perspectives emerged, inspired by the democratic global discourse and engagement which characterises the work of ICOMOS.

Sheridan Burke

ICOMOS Delhi General Assembly

Scientific Symposium Co-Chair

ⁱ *Sirius* John Dunn, Ben Peake, Amiera Piscopo, Piper Press Sydney 2017