



## **Museums and Cultural Landscapes: Policy Statement for South Africa**

**Draft document for discussion, July 2016**  
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The draft policy statement is based on discussions at a series of focus group meetings and workshops that took place in Gauteng, Western Cape, Free State, KwaZulu-Natal and the Eastern Cape in April – May 2016.

The draft document has been prepared for discussion by ICOM-SA and ICOMOS-SA to facilitate further discussion with the aim to prepare a second draft to be discussed at a National Workshop at the UNISA Museum of Anthropology and Archaeology on 26 August 2016.

Please submit comments to [h.vollgraaff@iburst.co.za](mailto:h.vollgraaff@iburst.co.za) by 12 August 2016.

*ICOM-SA and ICOMOS-SA are taking up the challenge posed by the 2016 ICOM International Museum Day Theme, Museums and Cultural Landscapes, to contribute to South African heritage management policy and to lobby on behalf of the heritage sector, its stakeholders and the South African society for a heritage and monument sector of excellence that are responsive to the needs of society. We accept this challenge acknowledging that the South African society is diverse and that a transformation of both the programmatic focus and engagement models used in the sector are needed to reflect professional ethics, democratic principles and an inclusive society.*

***South Africa is known for its exquisite natural landscapes and its vast botanical and zoological diversity. It is home to diverse communities and groups and within it is natural and man-made features and symbols with which individuals find identity and meaning.***

The South African cultural landscape includes elements reflecting a long geological history, biological diversity and the story of early human development. Its palaeontological and archaeological evidence and architectural structures reflect the evolution of human society and settlement over time, under the influence of the physical constraints and/or opportunities presented by their natural environment and of successive social, economic and cultural forces, both external and internal. This approach embraces a diversity of manifestations of the interaction between humankind and its natural environment. Museums collect these evidence of the present and past in a systematic way that provides knowledge of the past, developments over millennia and inspire us for the continued engagement with the people and the world around us.

Through public programmes including research publications, educational programmes and exhibitions, museums contribute to the understanding of cultural landscapes in the past and present times and is a source of knowledge of cultural elements that are not visible or do not exist anymore.

***The concept of cultural landscapes provides a conceptual framework for the heritage sector to contribute to an integrated development plan that takes into account heritage conservation, spatial planning and sustainable economic development.***

The concept cultural landscapes refer to spaces where human activity impacts on the environment. Rather than defining some spaces as special or significant in relation to other spaces, it is a planning and managing tool to describe elements of a landscape and the cultural value attached to it. This includes elements that are considered significant from a heritage perspective.

In South Africa, cultural landscapes reflect an unequal and separated past. South African cultural landscapes include landscapes of great beauty, but also environmentally and socially degraded landscapes that provide tangible markers of unequal access to resources. The broader heritage

sector aims to identify and protect elements in cultural landscapes that are conservation worthy in terms of aesthetic, architectural, historical, scientific, social, spiritual, linguistic, technological, archaeological or palaeontological value. These elements include tangible reminders of a contested history and injustices. The museum sector, in particular, provides forums for dialogue on the value attached to elements within cultural landscapes and how these should be managed in future.

Heritage conservation is but one dimension of cultural landscape management. South Africa is a developing country and education, job creation and improved living conditions are core needs of the South African society. Conservation models should be aligned with the National Development Plan, the government strategy to eliminate poverty, reduce inequality and increase social cohesion. This may need a reskilling of the heritage and museum sector.

While it is acknowledged that the heritage and museum sector provides cultural infrastructure for creative industries and the heritage tourism is already an important contributor to economic growth, museums also play an important role in socio-economic development by providing forums to society to participate in decision-making on socio-economic and cultural programmes and strategies.

***The concept of cultural landscapes is based on new heritage management approaches. It calls for a new conservation management model that involves all stakeholders and provides an integrated approach towards heritage is needed.***

The significance of the landscape reflects not just the sum of the individual parts, but rather the landscape as an integrated whole. It is the nature of the relationship between features, and between features and the broader landscape setting, that is important. There is a spiritual element to a cultural landscape. People find meaning and belief in these different landscapes and connect with each other through these meanings and beliefs. Heritage elements can therefore not be understood and conserved in isolation, but as elements of a larger landscape that provides context to these relationships. Contemporary heritage conservation practice takes a holistic approach to conservation that acknowledges the relationships between different elements of the landscape, whether man-made or natural, intangible or tangible.

Internationally, modern preservation values are broadening to include sites and landscapes with contested histories. The values most recently driving historic preservation include universal, ethnographic and provocative educational values, as well as interventions at sites and landscapes associated with difficult histories. Endurance of these landscapes is necessary for healing and for remembrance of the meaning and significance of associated experiences.

Public participation is critical in contemporary heritage conservation practice as people, their daily needs, relationships and beliefs are part of the cultural landscape. South Africa is a diverse society and heritage elements have a different meaning for different groups. Meanings attached to heritage elements do not only differ between groups of people from different cultural backgrounds and historical experiences, but also change within the same group over time. Cultural landscapes continuously change due to development pressures and that may impact on the relationship between a heritage element and the cultural landscape. Museums are supported by “Friends”

organisations and have multiple community partnerships. These existing partnerships and networks can be utilised to create a more coherent management model.

The heritage and museum sector is funded and managed by diverse authorities resulting in a fragmented policy development and decision-making. Governing authorities span national, provincial and local government to corporate institutions and independent community groups. This is exacerbated by a lack of capacity and funding in professional associations. A forum where government, professional associations and private heritage and museum organisations can interact to ensure an integrated conservation approach is required. This includes sharing of information and databases on heritage elements.

Heritage management bodies are not valued members in local economic planning and local spatial development planning.

***Public awareness and political action are needed to implement effectively national and international commitments related to cultural landscapes.***

All citizens are responsible for the landscape both as individuals and as part of a community and this responsibility must therefore be assumed in its entirety, taking into consideration all its countless and different components and dimensions. It is a responsibility that demands active interventions for its protection, conservation and understanding within a participatory logic and a sustainable development perspective. Museums together with all authorities, associations and institutions, involved in its protection and appreciation have the same responsibility.

Museums should actively create channels for public consultation and in public policy and decisions on heritage conservation. Museums are also an important channel for the dissemination of knowledge on heritage elements. In its role as communication channel, museums should be aware of power relations within society and actively seek to disturb power relationships that create unequal access to public participation.

***Museums have an important role to play in the management of cultural landscapes. This is especially true in rural areas where local museums play a leading role in the conservation of the heritage elements in the cultural landscape.***

Museums are part of landscapes. Often, they are part of heritage precincts that contribute to the civil status and a sense of place. In other cases, such as many towns, they form a heritage information hub within a larger cultural landscape. Museums do not have to be confined to buildings, but can consist of cultural precincts such as markets, residential areas, ecomuseums, natural landscapes, cultural landscapes that are researched, interpreted, conserved and communicated for the benefit of society. New models for museums should not be seen as an attempt to replace existing forms, but supplements existing models. Whatever the museum model being used, museum education staff should expand their teaching venues to include elements of the surrounding cultural landscape.

Many museum buildings are housed in historical buildings. In re-using a historical building as a museum, the emphasis should be on the conservation of the historical value of the building while adapting it according to museum requirements. These historical buildings that are used as museums mean that the museum is responsible for the management of building according to conservation standards as well as being a stakeholder in the management and conservation of the historical precinct in which it is situated. A proper museum infrastructure is needed for the upkeep and maintenance of museums and museum buildings.

Museums are knowledge centres that collect evidence and interpretations of cultural landscapes, including heritage elements, conduct research and disseminate knowledge of these cultural landscapes. Museums undertake this role to the benefit of society. Therefore they should be driven by the interests and life experiences of the surrounding communities.

Though there is great opportunity and benefit to be derived in integrating museums with their immediate environment, these opportunities and benefits are not yet been fully exploited.

***Events of the past year have demonstrated that attitudes towards monuments and sites, memorials and museums stem from public frustration caused by the lack of effective social and economic transformation in South African society, rather than the simple symbolic significance of statues.***

South Africa is a transformed and forever changing country, experiencing unsolved conflicts and difficult negotiations between often incompatible interests and values. These determine the evolution of the country, often for the most part far from the ideal notion. Recent events resulting in the vandalism of memorials and statues and the destruction of art works, affirm the symbolic value of heritage and public art. There is a role for heritage and the museum sector to sensitize society about the irreplaceable value of heritage resources. However, at the same time these acts of vandalism and destruction should be interpreted as effort to create a new public memory and the heritage and museum sector should rise to the challenge to create channels of constructive debate and action. Yet, the sector was silent during recent events and that a collective response is required regarding the transformation of memorials, monuments and museums.

Although the focus of debate on transformation and social cohesion has moved beyond an initially narrow focus on the heritage sector, the question of change in our society during two decades of democracy cannot be separated from important issues facing museums and heritage professionals. Active social cohesion in the greater society is required. In addition, understanding the position points of the different groups in the country with regards to heritage and monument and space is vital in being able to address these issues.

***A critical analysis of the meaning of museums and heritage elements is required to ensure that heritage strategy is rooted in informed decisions.***

During the national debate on the defacing and removal of colonial and apartheid-era monuments it has become clear there is no single, agreed upon understanding of what statues or memorials represent at a basic conceptual level. We have an inadequate grasp of what different people may

define as a monument, or what memorials aim to achieve. Such divergent senses of meaning for artefacts in the heritage landscape is largely separate from the content of any specific memorial, and underlines the various ethnic, cultural, linguistic and economic divisions that exist in South Africa. A thorough survey is required on monuments, museums and their diverse meanings among South Africans, as well as concrete numbers of who visits heritage sites and their reasons for doing so. Gaining a better understanding of how monuments are defined by a broader spectrum of society could also form part of wide-ranging consultative process on museums and monuments that is not limited to heritage professionals.

Museum natural and cultural history research can contribute to expanding knowledge about heritage resources and should be accessible to other stakeholders. Museums can contribute to the knowledge around features of the cultural landscapes through disseminating information, communicating narratives, using objects to depict changes in cultural landscapes including features no longer visible.

***Heritage oriented education is an effective vehicle for advocacy***

The most sustainable approach to transformation in our cultural landscape is the cultivation of a keen and thoughtful interest in national symbols and heritage among young South Africans. Teaching history in schools, as well as education programmes in museums, are effective ways to achieve this aim. Children have an instinctive interest in their personal and family history, which can easily be extended to awareness of a “national narrative”, which they are also part of. It is necessary to identify which narratives are missing from or under-represented in the current history syllabus, and for painful aspects of the past in South Africa to be dealt with directly. Museums have a practical role to play in this process, to develop relevant exhibitions and programmes to support the formal content taught in schools. Through education about the past South Africans will have assumptions challenged about what they know of their own ethnic communities, as well as others. While the primary focus of education programmes should be aimed at school-going age groups, the importance of heritage conservation must also be brought to the attention of leaders and decision makers in society. Regrettably, there is a general lack of awareness of threats facing the sector, particularly with regard to damage of African artefacts and intangible culture being eroded.

***Museums are future and people oriented and can play an important role in the transformation of the way in which we memorialise through providing space for intervention, dialogue and education.***

Heritage is a contested space. The transformation heritage should be approached taking a cultural landscape approach where museums, memorial and public art are part of a greater whole. Deciding on the future of museums, memorials and public art should take into consideration the relationship between the contested symbol and its location in the past and present and complex narratives around the contested symbol. In debating the future of these symbols, it is not only the needs and views of the present generation that should be taken into account, but one should also respect past generations and allow future generations to make their own decisions.

Various options are possible including:

- Re-interpretation of symbols to redress neglected histories and contributions.
- Relocation of symbols to change the power hierarchy inherent in the relationship between the symbol and its physical environment. If the symbol is relocated, the new place should have a connection to the symbol.
- Removal of the symbol thereby removing the associated event, activity or person from public history.

The transformation of the heritage symbols should include extensive and inclusive public participation and affirm diversity and inclusivity as protected by the Constitution of South Africa. Museums can create interventions, whether physical or virtual, to create safe spaces around the identification of values, diverse narratives and demands for transformation around features of landscape, such as architectural character of areas, future development, transformation of memorials, monuments and statues, public art. Museums can provide forums for intercultural and intergenerational dialogue in order to create new narratives around features of the natural and cultural environment. Such forums can also contribute to breaking down stereotypical perceptions of “other” while providing an opportunity to reflect on one’s own perceptions and values and the impact this have on the “other”. In addition, museums can create opportunity for the public to create collective values and memories that transcend experiences of the cultural group they normally associate with.

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