

PRESERVING INTANGIBLE HERITAGE RESOURCES: EXAMPLES FROM SOUTH AFRICA

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1. INTRODUCTION

Within the broad conference theme of Place-Memory-Meaning, the other Thematic Sessions allow platforms for philosophical and theoretical debate on the issue of the nature of intangible heritage, whereas this Thematic Session deals more pertinently with *praxis*. Nevertheless, in having to confront the conservation of intangible values in practice there is always need to acknowledge the indivisible link between *praxis* and a philosophical and theoretical base.

Due to my training as architect, my involvement in a multi-professional practice is mainly concerned with urban conservation. In coming to terms with the intangible values that form part of a settlement, it is interesting to revisit our well-known and well-used Burra Charter¹, because it featured largely in the conception of aspects and detail of the South African National Heritage Resources Act 25/1999. It seems clear that at the time (1988) the concept of 'place'² denoted a physical aspect only (although views were included), while aspects like 'associations'³ (social or spiritual values) and 'meanings'⁴ (relating to intangible aspects such as symbolic qualities and memories) were not included in the concept of 'place' - Yet, when it identifies 'cultural significance'⁵ as being embodied in the 'place' itself, its *fabric, setting, use, associations, meanings, records, related places and related objects*, the intention is clearer - 'Conservation' is described as the retention of cultural significance, i.e. conservation based on a respect for the existing *fabric, use, associations* and *meanings*⁶. All of our combined experience of practice with the Burra Charter confirms its description of the inseparable nature of 'place', 'association', 'meaning' and 'values' - on hindsight it is possible that the Burra Charter's definition of the term 'place' needs re-evaluation.

From both a phenomenological and a cultural-constructionist viewpoint, the idea of 'place' as physical is replaced by an idea of 'place' being a mental construct, a result of a synergetic relationship existing between an individual/s and a physical site and related elements, that occurs as the individual/s ascribe/s either perceptual or associational meanings to settings, through environmental perception and cognition (either intuitive or through a process of deliberate decoding). Any cultural landscape may conversely be decoded, in that its intended or purposefully encoded meanings, as well as its accrued meanings, may be read or deciphered from a recognition and understanding of the socially constructed, multi-layered relationships between people and a physical site and related elements.

While the idea of intangible values has during the last decade been embraced in the conservation of cultural landscapes where a close spiritual relationship between society and nature is strongly manifested (specifically as seen in the revised criteria for cultural landscapes, which recognise the continuum of, and interactions between, culture and nature), the idea has not necessarily been universally embraced. The Schroeder House debacle has shown that the conservation of intangible values is multi-faceted and can be problematic, even in the upper echelons of the conservation world. Also, while we conservationists actualise the idea of intangible values on paper when we construct our multi-layered interpretations and definitions of cultural significance, it remains difficult to actualise those constructed definitions, as well as ensure their continued legibility, in reality, in a plural society, how do you preserve intangible values of places where definitions are contested or compete with one another? When new political visions are enacted, planning codes are written, engineering decisions are made, and stones and buildings are managed over time, how are these definitions incorporated, enacted and sustained? In a developing environment tangible heritage fabric often disappears due to deficient heritage management structures or by the yearning for the new, leaving only the intangible heritage. In planning environments that value the tangible over the intangible, how then do we practically ensure the retention of the intangible?

2. THREE CASE STUDIES

Case study 1

Low-cost housing units in a 'mixed' cultural property - Blyderiver canyon and Pilgrim's Rest, Mpumalanga Province

¹ Australian ICOMOS. 1988. Burra Charter.

² Ibid. Article 1.1: *Place* means site, area, land, landscape, building or other work, group of buildings or other works, and may include components, contents, spaces and views.

³ Ibid. Article 1.15 Associations mean the special connections that exist between people and a *place*.

⁴ Ibid. Article 1.16. *Meanings* denote what a *place* signifies, indicates, evokes or expresses.

⁵ Ibid. Article 1.2 *Cultural significance* means aesthetic, historic, scientific, social or spiritual value for past, present or future generations.

⁶ Ibid. Article 3.1

The commission was to provide guidelines to test a politically-motivated promise to a community of black informal settlers, namely, that 500 'affordable' houses of 40m² each would be constructed by the State on a particular terrain within the heritage site of Pilgrim's Rest at the southern end of the Blyde River Canyon. These two heritage places, together, were at the time being nominated as 'mixed' cultural property for inclusion on the World Heritage List.

Apart from some brief examples, the paper format does not allow for elaboration of the processes involved in the studies. The fact that we were dealing with a site that was nominated for World Heritage status, required that we format the study in a way that would ensure that the quality of the heritage impact assessment process, the development guidelines and the end product would not jeopardise the WH process.

In terms of the audit and verification of tangible heritage, as well as the assessment of cultural significance of the site, the study provided the necessary motivation to shift the focus of conservation from the residential portion of the town only, to include the complete mining history of the settlement, i.e. the industrial as well as the social footprint.

In terms of intangible heritage, the following is deemed pertinent to the discussion:

- The team worked in a contested area, in which there were apprehensions amongst local conservators about the effects of the unmediated nature of the political decision to allocate a site, apprehensions in sectors of the entrenched white community about enlargement of the 30 year old black township, whose size and content was always strictly controlled during the Apartheid era up to 1996, while the still-separate black community felt that justice would be served by being at long last allowed tenure and free access to the economy of a popular and lucrative tourist area.
- The site's long history of black occupation, black labour involvement in the mining and transport industry, as well as various forced removals of black inhabitants, was uncovered in the study. In defining the cultural landscape as a mining ecology within which white and black co-constructed an important industrial enterprise, which happened to shape the destiny of the nation, but whose destiny was in the (white) hands of the ZAR (a Boer Republic), the Union of South Africa and ultimately the Republic of South Africa, the question of renewed black occupation of a heritage site looked radically different.
- Analysis of the historical town's morphological typology indicated a specific response to the natural topography. During the Apartheid era an exclusively black township was built outside the historical town, showing a similar response, but it was 'hidden' behind a Blue gum plantation, identified in the study as being the oldest remaining afforestation project related to mining in South Africa.

- Apart from preserving heritage fabric related to the Blyde River Canyon relict landscape, the visual qualities from defined viewpoints along and at the end of a defined scenic tourist route had to be protected.

The study (Bakker & Van der Waal, 2000a/b; Young, 2000) managed to identify a site for the 500 houses with the minimum environmental impact in terms of the defined cultural significance, relating to both heritage and visual resources, and which would resonate with the defined significance of the cultural landscape. In terms of conserving intangible heritage, the following was achieved:

- a) The study managed to come to solutions, based on the needs of the conservation community, politicians, future inhabitants, as well as of the entrenched inhabitants, by being based on a multi-layered definition of cultural significance that negotiated unproductive and unjust racially-based economic, political and heritage-related decisions of the past, and provided sound conservation guidelines for the future, which could stand up to prejudiced arguments.
- b) Urban design guidelines were proposed to ensure that the new settlement would resonate with the pattern in which the earlier settlement responded to the natural topography, rather than follow the self-centred and supposedly cost-saving dictates of a low-cost settlement of the kind proposed (An additional result of this approach was that necessary linkages between the new settlement and the existing could occur in a way that would improve the legibility of the previously neglected heritage footprint while providing opportunities for tourist access to currently inaccessible heritage elements).
- c) Crucial scenic views were protected, the heritage footprint remained intact and the sense of place of the valley and the character of the approach to the historic settlement at the end of the descent in the Blyde River Canyon remained intact. The new settlement was not hidden from sight as was the earlier black settlement, but was designed to illustrate a sensitive response to an existing heritage footprint, to respond to the critical visual qualities of the area and to integrate and be integrated with the economic opportunities afforded by diverse elements of the cultural landscape. The historical Blue gum plantation afforded the opportunity to densify, diversify and expand the existing black township, to improve the quality of life and to allow 'integrated bridging' between the old and new settlements, without detracting from existing visual qualities from the scenic routes.

The integrated visual and heritage guidelines were included in town planning guidelines written for the new settlement - subsequent planning reacted to the guidelines, but the settlement has not yet been built. An important lesson learnt from the project was that one should require immediate dissemination of heritage decisions to all State departments dealing with the specific environment.

Due to a lack of integration in the planning process, the historical Blue gum plantation was removed by the Forestry department in a drive to eradicate water thirsty invader species along watercourses. This single act has not only resulted in the loss of tangible heritage fabric, with a resulting decrease in legibility, but also of intangible heritage associated with planning approaches and racial attitudes during South Africa's Apartheid era.

Case study 2

Proposed headquarters of the Dept of Foreign Affairs at the Union Buildings in Pretoria, Gauteng Province

The commission was to provide development guidelines for a new State Department that was to be adjacent to the Union Buildings complex, and encroaching into its confines. Research indicated that existing analyses by various architects (eg Greig (1970); Radford (1988); Keath (1992)) did not provide the required holistic definition of the original design's embodied values, in turn precluding a full understanding of the complex as 'place' and its role in wider concrete and abstract environment.

The Union Buildings and its surrounding gardens, a neo-Classical design that introduced the British colonial 'Empire' style, is described by Fisher as "South Africa's most public work of art" (2001). It was designed by Sir Herbert Baker, in collaboration with Sir Edwin Lutyens and Gordon Leith, as a memorial to reconciliation and a national icon of a custodianship of collective good governance, following the 1910 union between various political segments of South Africa after the South African War of 1900-2. After the disbanding of the Union in 1961, the complex was again embraced as seat of government by the regime of the independent Republic of South Africa, and again by the current regime that fought and won the battle for democracy in 1994. Serving and enduring three radically different regimes, and being chosen as one of only a handful of National Monuments in the new South African political dispensation, illustrates that the cultural significance centres around the complex's enduring expression of national governance, but that it embodies values beyond the direct expression of a singular definition of nationhood or cultural grouping.

Baker's own writings on architecture, his correspondence on the design of the complex, as well as his design sketches and construction drawings, were used to augment existing analysis and to reach a conclusion about embodied values - both tangible and intangible.

Baker was trained in the Beaux Arts and his work expressed all the ideals and virtues that are inherent to the Classical tradition, where architectural aspirations lie beyond the reach of fashion. Baker was much influenced by Reginald Blomfeld whose writings (1908), apart from being the inspiration for Baker's use of the 'Grand Manner' style in the design of the complex, demanded that all the elements of a great architectural work have to be guided and held together by a "lofty ideal" or "intellectual conception, which goes beyond detail... and will... "embody in concrete form noble thoughts, and aspirations which lie beyond the reach of fashion".

Baker intended the Union Buildings to be a sacred Classical *temenos*, a collection of routes, vistas, spaces and buildings with a special relationship to their site, moulded in the image of Agrigentum, that would express a unity of people and site which found its concentrated expression in the central amphitheatre or meeting place. The perceptive listener will immediately say "Yes, but Blomfeld writes about expressing this idea in concrete form", in other words, how is your thesis relevant to the aspect of conserving intangible heritage? The issues significant to this interjection are

- that Baker's design, which was intended to be a collection of spaces and structures with the Union Buildings as its focus, is still an incomplete architectural work - this means that the intended overarching design 'idea', knowledge of which has faded from society's consciousness over the hundred odd years, had to be recaptured from his dispersed writings to guide in any future extensions and additions, within a continuously evolving cultural context, and that the idea has to be conserved to be able to play a role in managing the conservation of a special heritage place;
- that the surrounding urban fabric and its relationships are not expressions of a static 'blueprint' but are, like the complex, 'incomplete' and continuously changing around the complex over time - this demands that the intended relationship of the complex and its urban setting has to be conserved within a continuously reconstituted or co-constructed 'idea' of that relationship;
- that Baker's design was a far-reaching idea that also included newly-conceived ideas about the relationship of human society, its products and the natural world within an interrelated whole - following ideas of 'Holism' conceived by his friend, mentor and supporter, Gen Jan Christiaan Smuts - which demands that we preserve an understanding of a relationship between idea, building and a wider natural and cultural environment that goes beyond the boundaries of the site and which includes intangible components like cultural tolerance, understanding of ecologies and the multivalent relationships implied by 'place'.

The heritage conservation management input, which started off as a heritage impact assessment for a specified design adjacent to the Union Buildings, now focussed on entrenching an integrated development vision by means of endorsement by the South African Heritage Resources Agency (SAHRA), subsequently integrating the work of all development stakeholders operating on a site scale as well as a city-wide scale, within a new definition of the intangible qualities underpinning an understanding of the Union Buildings as a heritage place. The Department of Public Works, as protector of the National Estate, in this way gained the necessary authority to demand that the Municipality re-evaluate designs outside the immediate site of the proposed State Department - which included an urban design project for a ceremonial axis terminating on the Union Buildings - now based on the redefined significance of the heritage place.

The heritage consultant's brief was in this way augmented to include urban design guidelines which focused on a site, precinct as well as regional urban scale -which included the conservation of intangible heritage- and whose guidelines would subsequently be part of the heritage conservation guidelines of the Union Buildings.

The intangible heritage identified in the conservation management process (Bakker et al, 2001; Young, 2001) included the recognition and the importance of space design as part of the definition of significance, *inter alia*:

- i) Recognition of the sacred nature of the development – this included enforcing the intentional break in spatial ordering system between the Union Buildings and surrounding urban context in the urban design guidelines, as well as enforcing the sense of sacred isolation through non-encroachment and spatial distance between new developments and the existing complex. Upholding the idea of a special focal point in an open space defined by the surrounding urban fabric required that no building copy the architectural style of the complex and/or align itself to any of the design axes of the complex.
- ii) Retention of the spatial relationship between the Union Buildings complex and natural elements on the horizon, i.e. the various ridges around the city that gave the city its definitive shape and that shelter the historical core of the city – Baker visually integrated the Classicist design with the strongly-manifest African landscape that cradled earlier non-Western inhabitants. Recognition included height restrictions for any new developments adjacent to the complex and the protection of sightline corridors in the urban design guidelines, as well as the use of the plinth of the complex as a datum level for protection of important visual connections from vantage points west of the complex.
- iii) Retention of the intended spatial relationship between the Union Buildings and the historical core of the inner city, i.e. recognising the need for the preservation of 'middle distance' elements to indicate a physical separation from the centralised city of the previous order whilst retaining a spatial unity with it –this included recognition of the importance of a swath of trees intended for removal to accommodate a VIP car park, as well as the strengthening of deteriorated vegetation between the complex and the proposed development.
- iv) Reconstitution of the old curvilinear Carriage Way as the intended manner of approach – the Carriage Way led one through a (planned) indigenous African landscape providing well-controlled glimpses of portions of the Union Buildings, and at the apex of the drive, in the manner of Delphi, the full disclosure of the total complex and its site to make comprehensible the rationality inherent to its Classical conception combined with a deeper relationship of the complex with its African natural and, by implication, cultural landscape. While this design interpretation of African culture, indicative of its time, is part of its cultural significance, the current understanding of the indigenous landscape manages to reinforce the complex's African locale.

- v) The design of the new, urban-scaled boulevard ending at the Union Buildings was changed to recognise the latter's priority.

Conservation guidelines were written into the planning guidelines for the site to be developed.

In rereading Baker's founding intentions and in overlaying those with subsequent meanings attached to the site -those relationships between people and site, which constitute the idea of 'place'- the conservation of intangible aspects of the heritage site was made possible. While the guidelines will eventually be expressed in 'concrete' or tangible form as additions and alterations occur in or around the heritage site, such concretisation would not have been a reality without the conservation of intangible aspects inherent to the 'idea' underlying the totality of the complex.

The high profile of the project sustained a high degree of integration of heritage guidelines, especially those regarding intangible values, with other planning guidelines – I can safely say that this was unusual in the current development scenario in South Africa, where this level of integration is not common. Alterations to other (less 'important') existing buildings around the heritage place or new projects will most probably not be subject to the same level of scrutiny. The necessity of immediately revising existing urban planning guidelines for the vicinity of the Union Buildings was demonstrated by transgressions of most of our constructed guidelines in a project for an international five-star hotel across from the Union Buildings and on the city's ceremonial axis, resulting in reduction of legibility and understanding of the significance of the Union Buildings as a place – this development project preceded the heritage project under discussion here.

Case study 3 Inner city regeneration in Salvokop at Freedom Park in Pretoria, Gauteng Province

The commission was, as heritage consultant in a multi-professional team, to provide urban design guidelines, heritage conservation guidelines and policies in a Development Framework for the regeneration of a historical inner city site called Salvokop. The client was a partnership between the Freedom Park Trust acting for the State, the local Municipality and the landowner, Transnet, a state-controlled railway utility. This site had been an important railway precinct from 1894, before the South African War, from where a large portion of the country was opened up for industrial development, up to 1955. It had become derelict due to the relocation of its railway operations and to a structural shift from national railway to road transport. Due to the location of Salvokop in the inner city, and due to the location of Freedom Park – the country's premier national legacy site intended to be a sacred venue where the history of human freedom is to be celebrated- adjacent to Salvokop, the use of the precinct as a model for Post-Apartheid inner city regeneration was identified and the regeneration project was commissioned by a contract of parties from the State, railway utility and City.

The sparse previous analyses of the site focussed on building types and their stylistic aspects. There was no integrated heritage audit, historical time line, spatial and social narrative of the site and of its spatial and social relationships to the city and the region, which precluded an understanding of its 'placeness'.

In terms of the conservation of intangible heritage, the following is deemed to be pertinent for this discussion:

- Large portions of the precinct had been demolished – the first of these was the British conqueror's railway utility (the Central South African Railway) living quarters for black workers, called the 'Native compound' – this compound is a very important portion of colonial history in terms of the steady evolution of spatial control of black workers, the erosion of their rights and the special favouring of white workers, as was found in South American mines as well as South African mines at the time. Except for two derelict rooms altered for a railway office, the whole compound was razed by the Nationalist government soon after 1948, the advent of Apartheid and forced removals of black people to Homelands. The second portion of the precinct that was demolished was the precinct's reason for being, namely, the central works sheds, shunting yards, metal forges, coach building works, in short, the heart of the railway town was wrenched out and there were no more work opportunities. The third portion to be demolished was the high-density living area with terrace houses, torn down because these 'promoted slum formation'.
- The historical precinct was a working, industrial environment that never had buildings that were intensely coded, appeared almost 'ad hoc' apart from a few major urban relationships, and lacked large-scale formalist planning and urban 'beautification' devices. Different from most of the city, the precinct had always been a model of good social housing.
- The Freedom Park design preceded the development proposal for Salvokop and, due to its national significance, took precedence over the latter. Freedom Park is removed from major access routes, but requires highly legible access. The Framework proposed that access was provided through the historical access route to the Salvokop precinct, as well as by means of a new ceremonial pedestrian-cum-vehicular route. This larger, urban-order axial connection between the city's historical square (the past) and the sacred apex at the top of the mountain of the Park (the future) – from where other axes also linked to surrounding significant cultural resources (important moments in freedom struggles) – was prescribed in the Park Framework, requiring a formal spatial connection to be superimposed on the existing, currently empty portion of the site that never had a major access route or any axial planning.

- The Gautrain, a Provincial rapid rail system, is a new multi-billion dollar regional development project with a high political profile. Its elevated track veers into and tunnels right through the Freedom Park project, and an elevated concrete tube and viaduct traverses a currently undeveloped but historically built-up space of Salvokop precinct, in the process also passing above the historical station designed by Sir Herbert Baker in 1907.

The heritage audit and analysis provided the necessary tools to define the precinct's cultural significance, as well as the salient urban morphological relationships as they developed over a century. In terms of the relevant intangible heritage mentioned above, the following was achieved:

- i) Through tracing the lost urban morphology of the precinct over time, a series of historical morphological narratives were created, which, when combined and overlaid, provided a dense memory footprint to guide the Framework design team workshops in devising the scale, form, position and relationships of spaces, paths and forms of new infill in the areas where extensive demolition and loss of heritage fabric had taken place. Additionally, lost historical urban design aspects like legibility through focal elements, sightlines, edges and form, space and movement hierarchies were regained in a memory guideline for use in the urban design framework. Successive design phases of the Framework were tested against the memory footprint and guideline, and precinct urban design guidelines and the conservation policy and guidelines were constructed to enable preserving not only a memory of tangible historical morphological urban qualities, but also of intangible qualities.
- ii) Conservation policy and guidelines for the precinct were devised to preserve the existing heritage fabric, but also the historical 'feel', 'character' and 'sense of place' in terms of its industrial and working class roots, as well as its historical lack of formalism and beautification. The feel and character of existing urban fabric, like road surfaces, sidewalks, street edges and services, are included -additional infrastructure needed to cater for the intended higher density use for the precinct, are new overlays that are current designs that have to reflect the quality of historical 'placeness'. In terms of the social housing tradition of the place, the memory of the demolished Black workers' compound was re-activated by requiring that, additional to conservation of remaining heritage fabric on the site, integrated work and living situations and good social housing be re-introduced as a means of compensation to later generations. In terms of a memory of place, the guidelines require that the typological qualities, as well as building:space and building:street relationships of the historical compound, be used as guidelines for recapturing historical urban form and space relationships without mimicking the lost historical fabric. In this way the complex is intended, through commemoration, to amplify the only remaining memory of Black railway workers in the precinct and to redress past injustices.

- iii) Freedom Park is removed from major access routes but requires highly-legible access that visually communicates essential qualities of the Park's design concept. The Framework proposes that access is provided through existing roads in the Salvokop precinct, as well as by means of a new ceremonial route situated on a main urban axis but in an area of the precinct that never had a major access route or axial planning. For the ceremonial route, the current open site is developed to reintroduce the memory of historical public spaces where they occurred historically – while building positions, scale, form and interrelationship retain a memory of the historical. A current architectural language is prescribed and designers are required to formulate design concepts that incorporate the cultural significance and enter in a dialogue with the lost historical fabric without mimicking or copying stylistic traits.

The axially-placed section of the way is to be clearly read as a new, higher order urban intervention that connects the apex of the Park to the historical urban square by means of a visual connection across the historical Station. The guidelines stipulate that the new fabric be read as a distinctly defined overlay with a more individual architectural language and a formalist spatial typology. Nevertheless, in terms of a memory of the lost urban fabric, recognition of the working railway yard antecedents of the area and the memory of the lost historical footprint is required.

- iv) The regional Gautrain Rapid Rail System was conceived in engineering performance criteria only, with no recognition of the cultural content of the environment. The major visual and spatial connectors of Freedom Park, intended to unite monuments and places dedicated to disparate and opposing freedom struggles that played themselves out in the region, were obliterated by the train's horizontal and vertical alignments. An elevated bridge visually connected the Park to a national highway, therefore destroying the intention of a Park that gained a sacred nature through being physically separate from all surrounding urban fabric while being visually the focal point from all directions of approach. The rail crossed the major visual link to the Union Buildings, linking the Park and its ideals to the most public symbol of governance. The alignment crossed the only site suitable to create the 'Pool of Creation', a necessary element in the design that symbolised the mythical origins of the region's people. Also, the elevated station of the new train crossed the shed of the historical station and would form the visual backdrop of the historical station if seen from the city's historical square. In terms of the intended revitalisation of the Salvokop precinct, the alignment crossed open terrain where heritage fabric was lost – the alignment crossed the line of the required axis visually and physically connecting the apex of the Park to the historical urban square, the site being seen by the developers as 'empty land'. The scale, position and physicalities of the rail infrastructure precluded any reclamation of a memory of lost cultural landscape and sense of place as intended.

Despite the inclusion of concepts like cultural landscapes and intangible values in the country's Heritage Resources Conservation Act 25/1999, environmental consultants and developers would not entertain the idea of various intangible values being of similar or higher importance than engineering standards or regional development imperatives. Submissions of highly-detailed, spatially-correct visual impact simulations, combined with renewed descriptions of the manner in which the design of both Freedom Park and Salvokop Precinct conserved and generated historical values of an intangible nature, as well as detailed conservation guidelines that were defined as non-negotiable and accepted as such by the developer, provided the Freedom Park Trust with the necessary tools to request the national cabinet to obtain a Memorandum of Understanding from the developer that the train would be lowered underground. This decision was supported by the South African Heritage Resources Agency, and subsequently written into the Record of Decision regarding the final and approved alignment. While the heritage team was successful in this arena, other places along the alignment of the rapid rail where citizens were mostly left to their own devices to protect the city's intangible heritage, were not protected by the Record of Decision. This demonstrates the tenuous nature of the protection of intangible heritage resources despite their 'official' protection by law.

The heritage guidelines provided for the precinct development framework (Bakker & De Jong, 2003; Bakker, 2003) will become part of the precinct's planning guidelines, which will be enforced by the local Municipality, the precinct's management structure, as well as the SA Heritage Resources Agency.

3. RECAPITULATION

My short experience in working with historical settlements has indicated that, while the concept of intangible values may be enshrined in heritage conservation legislation, and while there are sensitised conservationists who understand and value the tremendous importance of coming to a rich definition of cultural significance that acknowledges the indivisible bond between the intangible and tangible, in many instances these values just fall by the wayside. While it is necessary to have critical and constructive debate on the issue of intangible heritage, there are conservationists (who perform large commissions) who are just unwilling to engage with the concept. Further, many local planning authorities and most developers are not sensitised to and cannot practically deal with the concept and the realities of preserving intangible heritage. With a few very exciting exceptions, where communities have inspired development concepts to rely heavily on the inclusion of intangible heritage in conservation work and have embraced the work of heritage consultants, or where the heritage component was intensified by a long deferral of reclamation of lost memory due to Apartheid, most development concepts in South Africa show little recognition of the role of memory and meaning of place in the present and for the future.

Moreover, in a developing environment, heritage management consultants are allotted very small budgets and very little time for research and analysis beyond that which is concrete. Despite current legislation they are often restrained from including work on intangible aspects through contractual means, or are dissuaded to do so through various forms of pressure, resulting in work that dwells more on conserving the visible, isolated element rather than the related ecology of place.

The case studies have shown that there is no problem in constructing 'rich' definitions of cultural significance that include the intangible dimension. Apart from issues around criteria for authenticity, judgement of and consensus about intangible values – with which we do not have to deal here – the problem is how to make any definition of the significance of intangible heritage manifest in conservation policies and guidelines, and how to sustain those guidelines in planning and management structures. It is very important that our work, in coming to definitions of cultural significance and in constructing conservation policies and guidelines that include intangible values, is to be regarded as having to become part of the ecology of a place. The residue which is deposited as a result of our endeavours of defining and conserving intangible heritage of a place should be carefully incorporated into the sustenance of an ecology of place, in order that our residue will be an indivisible part of what, later on, will be seen as the memory and meaning of place, as well as how we, at a given moment in time and place, have managed to deal with the concept of sustaining the conservation of intangible values.

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ABSTRACT

Under new heritage legislation in South Africa the conservation of 'place' and inherent intangible values have been enshrined, but are not readily supported by environmental controlling bodies and developers in practice. Three case studies are used to demonstrate how intangible place values were successfully defended where developmental and political pressures indicated their loss. The first example explains the process of identifying a suitable site and providing urban design guidelines for the introduction of 500 low-cost housing units in a 'mixed' cultural property that is earmarked for nomination for World Heritage status – namely, the gold-rush town of Pilgrim's Rest and the Blyde River Canyon – with the aim of retaining the intangible heritage resources whilst redressing historical race-based injustices and providing much-needed economic stimulus for the heritage place. In the second example the intangible values inherent to the Union Buildings in Pretoria – the seat of Government designed by Sir Herbert Baker – were defined and used as the departure point for urban design guidelines for the proposed headquarters of the Dept of Foreign Affairs planned in its proximity. In the last case study, the conservation process for an inner city regeneration project in a 100 year-old railway precinct in Pretoria at the foot of the new Freedom Park – a national legacy site commemorating African struggles for freedom – succeeded in retaining intangible heritage resources in the face of extremely compromising urban development pressures and low-cost housing needs, as well as the ravages of a rapid rail system which is soon to traverse the site.

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