

# ICOA1837: CANADA'S NATIONAL CONVERSATION ON CULTURAL LANDSCAPES

## Subtheme 01: Integrating Heritage and Sustainable Urban Development by engaging diverse Communities for Heritage Management

**Session 3:** World Heritage, Regulations and Guidelines, Authenticity and Integrity

**Location:** Gulmohar Hall, India Habitat Centre

**Time:** December 14, 2017, 09:10 – 09:25

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**Abstract:** Canada's National Conversation on Cultural Landscapes (NCCL) is an initiative that was launched by a small group of ICOMOS Canada members following the 18th General Assembly, who felt that the traditional tone of the discussions in Florence did not entirely resonate with our experience as professionals and scholars in the field of heritage conservation nor with contemporary heritage practice within our regions. Motivated by a belief that Canadian experiences could help further the international discussion on cultural landscape as a new paradigm for heritage, the NCCL set out the ambitious goal of attempting to identify Canadian perspectives on cultural landscape practice. Rather than looking at cultural landscapes as a type of heritage, the intent was to focus on how the concept has been and is being defined, understood and practiced as an 'approach' that considers the expressions of a community's relationship with their environment (built or natural) through their place-making activities. To help us foster a cross-country dialogue, a web platform was created and a series of public web-based conversations were held with practitioners in the field over the course of two years, reflecting a broad range of ways in which a 'cultural landscape approach' is being used around the country.

This presentation highlights key themes that emerged from the conversations. A sampling of such themes include the substantive challenge of defining a coherent 'cultural landscape approach' on one hand and yet the immense potential gleaned from participatory 'cultural landscape approaches' on the other hand. The Canadian experience tends to suggest participatory 'cultural landscape approaches' holds promise of: producing innovative ways of sustaining shared heritage; better integrating currently disparate practices in planning, development and environmental, social and cultural sustainability; and redefining our role as heritage professionals as meaningful contributors to improving the quality of life of our diverse communities.

**Key words:** *community, sustainability, participation*

## **Canada's National Conversation on Cultural Landscapes**

The National Conversation on Cultural Landscapes is an ICOMOS Canada initiative that was inspired by the 2014 ICOMOS General Assembly in Florence. It is an exploratory survey of the various approaches to cultural landscape being taken across Canada that seeks to serve as a useful foundation for evolving the practice of cultural landscapes in Canada and articulating Canadian perspectives on cultural landscape approaches at an international level.

### **Origins of the Inquiry**

In November 2014, over 30 members of ICOMOS Canada participated in the 18th ICOMOS General Assembly in Florence. Over the course of the conference, the Canadian delegates met informally to offer their impressions on how cultural landscape was being discussed. They shared a general sense that a Eurocentric approach to cultural landscape had dominated the proceedings. Stemming from European conservation practice, the pervasive understanding saw cultural landscapes as discrete, tangible objects, representative of historicity and protectable through conventional conservation methods. The Canadian participants felt that more consideration ought to be given to alternative models and approaches emerging from the Canadian context, and from other comparable natural and cultural contexts. Their observations suggested a number of themes and questions that would go on to frame a national conversation on cultural landscape.

First, the importance of language was identified. In particular, it's potential to create barriers. The example was given on how subtle notions pertaining to cultural landscapes did not translate well between English and French. Also, that the word "landscape" can accommodate multiple ways of talking and thinking about heritage – as built, natural, cultural, traditional, contemporary, intangible, while at the same time, is often used so broadly that it risks losing meaning. While the word's inherent flexibility can be an advantage, conflicting terminology poses a challenge to building consensus around Canadian perspectives of cultural landscape, and to sharing these perspectives with the international community.

Participants also suggested that there seemed to be a preoccupation with the documentation of cultural landscapes, which they felt to be only one of many steps in the process of conservation. It is important to think beyond documentation to understanding how that information can inform conservation strategies. As another early component of this process, cultural mapping was identified as a powerful tool that examines how the social, economic, and environmental elements integrate to create a place. Community generated mapping provides an understanding from within the community, rather than from the outside as is common in conventional heritage practice. Community input also helps to address another perceived problem in heritage practice – over-emphasis on the past rather than the present. Instead, participants discussed the need to look at traditional practices and cultural values that take on contemporary forms and speak to current issues.

Related to the idea of community involvement, participants also debated the role of the expert in heritage practice. One suggestion was that heritage conservation should entail empowering local communities or stewards to do what they can, or continue what they are already doing, instead of experts informing them of what should be done. It was thought that communities could seek the advice of experts as needed, but

that the conservation process should not begin with or overly rely on experts. Questions were posed about how heritage professionals could support cultural landscape activities, but then yield responsibility and agency to community stakeholders. What is the right balance and art of this process? How can heritage professionals create or facilitate environments that nurture cultural landscapes?

A final theme of the discussions was the need for diverse perspectives to shape heritage practice. Participants felt that conservation practice should be truly interdisciplinary. It was suggested that traditional knowledge could play a larger role in articulating a more holistic discourse, or breaking down the disciplinary silos within heritage practice. Furthermore, the Canadian heritage field, and specifically the current discourse on cultural landscapes, should better reflect the diversity of Canadian populations, and the complexity of Canadians' development and inhabitation of our geography. The discussion funnelled toward a need to articulate the range and contours of Canadian approaches to cultural landscape that reflect:

- Contemporary diversity and immigration;
- Ongoing relevance of cultural landscapes to identity and cultural wellbeing;
- Links between sustainable development and the social value of heritage;
- The intersection between cultural and natural conservation;
- Methods of knowing and understanding heritage as well as key questions, tools, and strategies;
- The disciplines and constituencies that should be involved; and
- Increased understanding and representation of Indigenous and rural perspectives.

Ultimately, the Canadian contingent at the ICOMOS General Assembly in Florence concluded that it would be valuable to survey the various approaches to cultural landscape being taken across Canada, including examination of the success of related community engagement and empowerment practices. This understanding would serve as a useful foundation for evolving the practice of cultural landscapes in Canada, and articulating Canadian perspectives on cultural landscape at an international level. Out of this discussion emerged the National Conservation on Cultural Landscape (NCCL) working group, whose work has confirmed, advanced, and added to these lines of inquiry.

## **Methodology and Approach**

The NCCL working group is composed of six professionals and scholars working in the field of heritage conservation. Representing four Canadian provinces and a variety of backgrounds and perspectives, the diverse make-up of the working group has been essential to the processes of defining the goals of the initiative, facilitating cross-country dialogue, exploring Canadian themes, and identifying under-represented discussion areas around the topic of cultural landscape.

At the outset, the working group held regular online meetings over the course of several months to collaboratively develop the NCCL's vision and objectives, create a web platform, and partner with ICOMOS Canada. Introductory presentations were made in May 2015 at the Architectural Conservancy of Ontario's annual conference and the UMass Amherst Centre for Heritage & Society's international conference. These events allowed NCCL organizers to actively engage in parallel discussions about cultural landscape in our communities, share the NCCL's objectives, and invite participants to follow the NCCL as it developed.

In the summer of 2015, a workshop was held at the ICOMOS Canada AGM in Edmonton, Alberta where a series of conversations with heritage practitioners from across Canada were facilitated around a common set of questions with the goal of pushing the NCCL initiative forward:

- How might articulating Canadian cultural landscape perspectives empower us as heritage professionals?
- What might Canadian perspectives or experiences bring to the international discourse on cultural landscape?
- What cultural landscape related challenges do you encounter in your work?
- How do we reach out to as broad and diverse an audience as possible?

These early conversations gave rise to the NCCL's video discussion series. Using professional networks and participant suggestions, heritage practitioners were identified and invited to discuss cultural landscape approaches that have been or are being developed for projects in Canada. The video discussions aimed for diversity in Canadian geography, settings, types of heritage practice, and types of cultural landscape approaches.

To date, eight discussions have taken place. Four have focused on site-specific projects in BC, Quebec, Nova Scotia, and Ontario, two of which were rural and two urban. The remaining four have focused on other national and international cultural landscape initiatives including parallel discussions about cultural landscape thinking and issues.

Wherever possible, the web-based discussions have been recorded and any visual aids have been uploaded to the NCCL website for future viewing and discussion.<sup>1</sup>

## **Summary of Case Studies and Discussions**

The NCCL web-based discussions provided the opportunity for practitioners across the country to share case studies as a means to facilitate discussion and exploration of Canadian perspectives on cultural landscape approaches. The case studies and discussions fell into two categories: professionally driven examples of experts adapting their practices to include cultural landscape approaches; and theoretically driven discussions of the convergence of diverse disciplines and institutions struggling with similar issues and questions raised by the NCCL.

To date, the web-based discussions have provided some preliminary observations on the state of cultural landscape approaches in Canada. For example, while the practice of heritage has tended to favour the physical and aesthetic values of a place, the value-based heritage conservation framework in Canada has proven to be flexible, to a certain extent. Within this framework, practitioners have been able to adapt their practice to put more emphasis on intangible values and acknowledge the complexities of a place, such as multiple narratives (often contested) embedded within a place and to employ participatory design processes that engage the local community in a meaningful way.

Another key observation is the convergence of diverse disciplines with the practice of heritage. This convergence is inevitable as we ask the practice of heritage to address issues of well-being and quality of life. As communities talk about a shared sense of place and identity, they do not separate heritage, design

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<sup>1</sup><http://nccl-ccpc.canada.icomos.org/video-discussion-series/>

and development from food security, public health, natural resource conservation, self-determination, etc. The implications for heritage practice are that our work may not look like “heritage” at all. For example, a public health initiative that makes use of traditional knowledge and healing practices is in fact achieving the perpetuation of shared values and meaning.

While the NCCL initiative has given rise to some fruitful dialogue, we have a keen awareness of our inability to reach a broader audience involving community driven initiatives, Indigenous perspectives, and cultural landscape approaches to the heritage of new Canadians in particular, and the wider application of cultural landscape beyond official heritage designation processes. Case studies where successful heritage conservation as the perpetuation of shared values and meaning is achieved outside the defined norms of the practice have been difficult to identify.

In addition, the tools and applications for cultural landscape approaches have been difficult to define throughout the NCCL endeavour. Perhaps there is no toolbox, but an attitude of cultural landscape, with a language and concepts that allow a heritage practitioner to pursue their work through inquiry. Further, as we pursue quality of life as the end result of our work as heritage professionals, our work will converge with other disciplines as the perpetuation of shared values and meaning is both the method and end result of achieving well-being in a community.

## **National Conversation Workshop**

Most recently, the NCCL working group facilitated a half-day workshop at the ICOMOS Canada 2017 AGM in Halifax, Nova Scotia during which key findings of the national conversation were presented and questions were posed to identify future directions. In small groups, attendees discussed i) what successful heritage conservation could mean in their work, and ii) the means which would enable changes to take place.

Success was described as being equally linked to the process of conservation as to its final outcome. The ideal outcome was generally identified as one that balances conservation and continued use, allowing accessibility, sustainability and viability of heritage; heritage as a driver for sustainable, healthy communities. The process to arrive at this is increasingly understood as an inclusive and multi-directional sharing of knowledge, in close partnership with community. Language was repeatedly cited as a key vector in this process of consensus-building, as well as an occasional obstacle to it.

The means by which these changes could be enabled included governance, relationships, tools, and processes and emerged as the following:

- A more horizontal and egalitarian governance based on the sharing of resources and a blending of community assets within a rational structure;
- More diverse and open relationships that reach out to marginalized groups, and an increasing reliance on informality to foster a sense of sharing;
- Careful listening and attention to language;
- Nimbler tools, more reflective of contemporary values and better able to foster consensus;
- Processes grounded in the early engagement and full integration of communities, which would enable transfer of knowledge through formal education as well as informal sharing and encourage multiple and diverse perspectives.

## **Conclusion**

The Canadian experience suggests participatory cultural landscape approaches hold promise of: producing innovative ways of sustaining shared heritage; better integrating currently disparate practices in planning, development and environmental, social and cultural sustainability; and redefining our role as heritage professionals as meaningful contributors to improving the quality of life of our diverse communities.

# ICOA1837: LA CONSERVATION NATIONALE DES PAYSAGES CULTURELS DU CANADA (NCCL)

## **Sous-thème 01: Intégrer le patrimoine et le développement urbain durable en engageant Diverses communautés pour la gestion du patrimoine**

**Session 3:** Patrimoine mondial, Réglementations et directives, Authenticité et intégrité

**Lieu:** Hall Gulmohur, India Habitat Centre

**Date et heure:** 14 Décembre, 2017, 09:10 – 09:25

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**Résumé:** Le NNCL a été créé à l'initiative d'un petit groupe de membres d'ICOMOS-Canada à la suite de la 18<sup>e</sup> assemblée générale. Nous avons ressenti que la tonalité des débats tenus à Florence ne résonnait pas entièrement avec notre expérience professionnelle ou universitaire touchant à la conservation du patrimoine ni avec l'actuelle pratique patrimoniale dans nos régions. Motivés par l'idée que l'expérience canadienne pouvait aider à faire progresser le débat international sur les paysages culturels comme nouveau paradigme pour le patrimoine, le NNCL s'est donné le but ambitieux d'identifier les perspectives canadiennes dans la pratique du paysage culturel. Plutôt que de considérer les paysages culturels comme une typologie de patrimoine, l'intention était de pointer la manière dont les concepts ont été définis, compris et mis en pratique dans une approche qui prend en considération les modes d'expression de la relation d'une communauté avec son environnement (bâti ou naturel) au travers de leurs activités. Afin de favoriser un dialogue national, un site web a été créé et une série d'interviews hébergées par cette plateforme ont été menées par des professionnels de terrain pendant les deux dernières années, reflétant la grande diversité des approches du paysage culturel utilisées dans le pays.

Cette présentation met en lumière les thèmes majeurs qui ont émergé de ces conversations. Un échantillonnage de ces thèmes induit la nécessité de rendre cohérente l'approche du paysage culturel d'une part, et ensuite rend compte de l'immense potentiel glané lors d'une approche participative du paysage culturel d'autre part. L'expérience canadienne tend à suggérer que cette approche participative tient ses promesses quant à la production de modes innovants de patrimoine partagé durable, quant à la meilleure intégration des pratiques habituellement disparates de la planification, du développement et de la durabilité environnementale, sociale et culturelle, quant à la redéfinition de notre rôle en tant que professionnels du patrimoine comme acteurs conséquents de l'amélioration de la qualité de vie de nos diverses communautés.

**Mots-clés:** communauté, durabilité, participation