The First Voice in Heritage Conservation

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ABSTRACT

The transformation of museological and heritage practices in the past decade continues to face challenges: not least in seeking to integrate tangible and intangible heritage. The majority of endeavours continue to aim to combine the established perspective of safeguarding the tangible heritage with approaches seeking to incorporate intangible heritage, but the dialogue is still largely being controlled by the 'establishment'. However, it is encouraging to report that demonstration projects have emerged using the concept of First Voice in order to find the balance between the old and new practices with respect for cultural diversity.

The First Voice

The last two decades in particular have seen the reworking of heritage policy and conservation from a hegemonic colonial or otherwise "first world" construct into an inclusive post-colonial practice, which has resulted in a transformative museum discourse. In this process, engagement with the increasingly important concept of the intangible heritage, standing alongside the long-established approach to the physical heritage, has been challenging for the 'establishment' working in heritage management, whether institutions, organisations or professional workers in the sector.[1]

The seminal meetings of the International Council of Museums (ICOM) in Shanghai 2002 and Seoul in 2004 provided unprecedented opportunities for intercultural dialogue, and in particular, for interrogating 'European' (including North American) paradigms and their colonial and post-colonial manifestations across the world.[2] These meetings further contributed to advancing the heritage movement towards a global venture that seeks to bring all the regions of the world into collaboration in exploring the ways and means to integrate tangible and intangible heritage into sustainable development. The axiomatic principle in this process is to recognise and

respect the First Voice - that is, the voice, both literal and metaphorical, of the actual carriers and custodians of cultures and their related heritage resources all over the world.[3]

The emerging notion of the First Voice is however most often associated with indigenous peoples at the present time, and it sits well ideologically with the better-known constructs of 'First Nations', 'First Peoples' or 'First Inhabitants'. The long struggle to ensure respect and recognition for the cultural rights of indigenous peoples required such critical positioning. In this respect, the 2007 *UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* is a turning point for the world.[4] Victoria Tauli-Corpuz, Chair of the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, said on the occasion of the adoption of the Declaration, that it:

has the distinction of being the only Declaration in the UN which was drafted with the rights-holders, themselves, the Indigenous People... [It] makes the opening phrase of the UN Charter, "We the

People..." meaningful for the more than 370 million indigenous persons all over the world.[5]

The Declaration poses several challenges and opportunities for intergovernmental bodies such as UNESCO and ICCROM and International Non-Governmental Organisations such as ICOM, the International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS), the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA), the International Council of Archives (ICA) and the World Conservation Union (IUCN). The immediate challenge is to rethink their core methods of engaging with indigenous issues through ethical ways of working together with indigenous peoples. A salutary example is the process of engagement that led ICOM and the Pacific Islands Museums Association (PIMA) to work together in partnership with UNESCO, the Commonwealth Association of Museums and the constituent partners of the Pacific Asia Observatory for Cultural Diversity in Human Development in the drafting of the PIMA Code of Ethics for Museums and Cultural Centres in 2006.[6]

Figure 1
Ralph Regenvanu facilitating the drafting of the PIMA Code of Ethics in Canberra, Australia, February 2006. Photo. Amareswar Galla

The Director-General of UNESCO, Mr Koïchiro Matsuura, said that the approval of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples is:

a milestone for indigenous peoples and all those who are committed to the protection and promotion of cultural diversity and intercultural dialogue....The newly adopted Declaration echoes the principles of the UNESCO Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity (2001) and the related UNESCO Conventions, notably the 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage and the 2005 Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions, all of which recognize the pivotal role of indigenous peoples as custodians of cultural diversity and biodiversity, embodied in the cultural and natural heritage.[7]

Several articles of the 2007 *UN Declaration* draw attention to the significance of intangible heritage, in particular in Article 31.1:

Indigenous peoples have the right to maintain, control, protect and develop their cultural heritage, traditional knowledge and traditional cultural expressions, as well as the manifestations of their sciences, technologies and cultures, including human and genetic resources, seeds, medicines, knowledge of the properties of fauna and flora, oral traditions, literatures, designs, sports and traditional games and visual and performing arts. They also have the right to maintain, control, protect and develop their intellectual property over such cultural heritage, traditional knowledge, and traditional cultural expressions.

The Declaration also affirms that 'all peoples contribute to the diversity and richness of civilizations and cultures, which constitute the common heritage of humankind'.

This is in line with the earlier emphasis of UNESCO that in order to protect the world's cultural diversity, we must give 'equal attention to its two basic ingredients, namely tangible heritage and intangible heritage'. Thus the broader framework is provided by the 2001 *Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity* (UDCD)[8]. This call for redressing the imbalances in heritage conservation applies at all levels: local, provincial, national, regional and global. It applies to all peoples of the world. In several countries colonialism and the marketplace have created an understanding of heritage that is not always locally relevant. The focus is often solely on tangible heritage - objects, sites and monuments.

The Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples sets the minimum standards, calling for the leadership and participation of indigenous peoples in all endeavours through their own First Voice. *UDCD* similarly envisages participatory democracy where the First Voice informs intercultural dialogue. In short the First Voice is the voice

Figure 2
Young novices in the National Museum, Phnom Penh, Cambodia. Can we bring the living heritage of Buddhism, collections and places together? Photo. Amareswar Galla

of the bearer of intangible heritage - individual or collective - or those that are the closest as primary stakeholders to a heritage resource, be it intangible or tangible, movable or immovable, natural or cultural. Thus the First Voice has a critical position in our endeavours to safeguard the cultural diversity and intangible heritage in sustainable heritage development.

Rethinking Heritage Conservation

Rabindranath Tagore, the late Indian Nobel Laureate, established the Visva-Bharati University. It is a place for teachers who realise 'that to teach is to learn', and pupils for whom learning is at the confluence of the two streams of the conscious and sub-conscious mind. While the conscious mind is often shaped by formal education, the latter is nurtured through experiential and reflexive learning. In a traditional setting one might feel satisfied by the '*current of influences that come from tradition*' which make it easy to '*unconsciously... imbibe the concentrated wisdom of ages*'. In post-colonial India where the homogenising forces of globalisation are overwhelming the cultural diversity of the country, the challenge is to focus on '*developing the sensitiveness of the soul for affording the mind its true freedom of sympathy*'.[9]

This 'sensitiveness' is critical for building the cross-cultural competencies necessary for understanding the cultural diversity of people and their intangible heritage. In Visva-Bharati, a place of holistic learning, Tagore focussed on the significance of both tangible and intangible heritage within an indigenous environmental philosophy framework that also challenges the colonial binary of nature and culture. Tagore, like so many thinkers from Asia and Africa, was concerned with the devastating impacts of colonial constructions of heritage.

The February 2008 ICOM workshop on Intangible 'Natural' Heritage, organised in Hyderabad and the Araku Valley in India, focused on locating the understanding and practice of safeguarding intangible heritage within the context of sustainable development. The workshop explored how the integration of cultural diversity and bio-diversity could be addressed in museums and heritage agencies through policy, planning and programs in South Asia. One of the central concerns was to understand and work with the young people in heritage conservation.[10]

Part of the agenda for convening this ICOM Workshop was to recognise, in a post-industrial, globalised world environment, that human development must be understood as a process that occurs locally, but also within a total natural and cultural environment. Planning for heritage development has to be much more than a function of economics, social or political change, well-being, human and cultural rights or sustainable physical environments. Rather, it is achieved within, and through, interplay of all these functions. If intangible heritage is the human face of globalisation, then we are wiser following Tagore's emphasis on integrated environmental philosophy.

Such processes for developing a holistic paradigm are inter-related, iterative, and necessarily achieved through collaborative and simultaneous endeavour, and this has been long recognised. They were first comprehensively yet succinctly described in the 2001 UDCD that distilled much of the earlier thinking. The UDCD came into being in a post-September 11 world - its significance was at the same time displaced (in the environment of global shock that then existed) as well as reinforced, by demonstrating the compelling need for an articulate and rational vision for global collective action and shared values, rather than reactive violence and oppositional politics.

The UDCD calls for a new understanding and celebration of the value of human difference as opposed to homogeneity. It is designed to protect and enhance the international intellectual, economic, spiritual and moral value of cultural diversity. It affirms this diversity as the vital resource to protect cultural rights, biodiversity, individual self-value, social harmony, cross-cultural communication and to 'humanise globalisation.' It was apt that this document was launched with a detailed Action Plan during the Johannesburg World Summit on Sustainable Development in 2002. Its spirit was embodied in the eloquent way that Arjun Appadurai called for integrated and holistic thinking in dealing with cultural diversity, tangible and intangible heritage and sustainable development.[11]

This philosophical thinking led to one of the key outcomes of the Summit, bringing to fruition a long struggle by many heritage action protagonists, that culture needs to be recognised as the fourth pillar of sustainable development, along with economy, education and environment. As an international policy framework, the UDCD can be adapted to national and international purposes to help transform civil society. It has the potential to improve community harmony, our relationship with the environment and the way we develop economies through a new understanding of the physical and human world.

Thinking in Africa before the Johannesburg Summit and the UDCD was echoed by the then ICOM President, Alpha Oumar Konare, in 1991, speaking about Africa when he used the words 'Kill the museum', in referring to the perceived need to disengage from the colonial paradigm of the museum and to further the future of new kinds of museums in post-colonial Africa.[12] This

transformative imperative and spirit informed the reconstruction and development program of museums, heritage agencies and national parks in democratic South Africa.[13] The Truth and Reconciliation Commission brought heritage and identity construction alive in a 'civil society bursting with energy about dealing with the past.'[14] The Arts and Culture Task Group that reviewed the legacies of colonial and apartheid museum and heritage practices, mapped out a comprehensive framework for change. They advocated that the practice of authorising as foremost, the tangible heritage of European origins with a bias towards middle and upper class, metropolitan and male interests, which supported the legitimacy of a hegemonic western discourse and its apartheid manifestations in South Africa, be discarded.[15]

The intangible living heritage, *amasiko/ditso*, an African concept of heritage conservation in South Africa, is central to the rethinking. The location of intangible heritage as living and dynamic in post-colonial museology and historiography, the limitations of museographical tools for its documentation and interpretation, and the ability to retain the integrity of the First Voice of the primary carriers of intangible heritage are being critiqued.[16] The focus is on the centrality of what we now term the First Voice in the development of a museological discourse grounded in the African context and the African Renaissance movement, and in the rethinking of the museum as a post-colonial cultural centre where '*the tangible can only be understood and interpreted through the intangible*'.[17]

When launching the Robben Island Museum in 1997, Nelson Mandela commented that South Africa's museums and monuments had reflected the experiences and political ideals of a minority to the exclusion of others during colonialism and the apartheid era, and that this was also '*a vital part of South Africa's collective heritage. Siqithini - the Island, a place of pain and banishment for centuries and now of triumph - presents us with the rich challenge of heritage.*'[18] Interpretation through the memories and First Voice of former prisoners and warders on Robben Island provides an intangible heritage context which is used to interpret the tangible places, landscapes, structures and other material culture as well as the environmental hinterland. Similarly, the development of the District Six Museum in Cape Town as a 'Place of Resistance and Triumph Over Apartheid' was

curated through the voices of the very people that the official scripts failed to erase from the record.[19] The Museum was founded with the commitment that *'Never Again Must People Be Forcibly Removed'*. It aims to ensure that the history and memory of forced removals in South Africa endures, and in the process that it challenges all forms of social oppression. The museum is conceived as a house of memory, as a landscape of struggle and temple for the First Voice.

In welcoming the *Art contre Apartheid/Art against Apartheid* collection to its final destination at the Parliament House in Cape Town in 1996, Nelson Mandela wrote that the works:

> *range across the scale of human emotion, from anger to zeal to love and sorrow. Such works demand the viewer's attention, they challenge our beliefs and values, they remind us of past errors but they also speak of hope for the future.[20]*

In this context museums in South Africa take on a critical role, and the government's position is clear in stating that '*museums are key sites for the formation and expression of knowledge and cultural identity. South African museums will be restructured so that they reflect in every way the collective heritage, the new identity, and the ethos of a multicultural, democratic South Africa*'. Locating the multiple voices of people in museums and heritage institutions has become the central concern.

Indigenous curators from Pacific Island countries and Australia have provided critical leadership in arguing that the ICOM definition of the museum continues to be object-centred, and that the understanding of the museum needs to be liberated in order to encompass the idea of a genuinely inclusive cultural centre that facilitates the continuity of living heritage.[21] Ralph Regenvanu, who championed the location of the First Voice in the Vanuatu Cultural Centre and National Museum, brought his expertise to the drafting of the 2002 Shanghai Charter and the 2003 UNESCO Convention on Intangible Heritage, commented:

> *The Pacific Islands are made up of over twenty states and territories in an area covering over half of the world's surface. The Pacific Islands region has the highest rate of indigenous people within the national population of any region of the world, and also the highest rate of customary land ownership. The Melanesian region... has a combined population of less than 10 million people but hosts one-fifth of the world's languages. There are two characteristics of our cultures: they are contemporary societies that demonstrate a high level of cultural continuity with previous generations; and the tangible elements of the culture are but a small sub-set of the intangible elements, which are all-encompassing.[22]*

In Australia, the national affirmative action program for the participation of Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islanders in Australian heritage institutions (1985-1992), was facilitated from the position that *all* heritage is intangible and that it is illustrated through tangible heritage, the interpretation of which through the contemporary gaze, must give primacy to the First Voice of the primary stakeholders.[23] In 1991 during what is

Figure 4
Relaunching ICOM South Africa in May 2007 at the Cradle of Humanity World Heritage Area, Jatti Bredekamp speaking passionately about the importance of locating First Voice in post colonial African museums. Photo. Amareswar Galla

considered one of the largest meetings of Aboriginal elders on the banks of the Crocodile Hole in the Kimberley, it was eloquently argued that 'culture is a map written in the land' and that it is read through the cumulative memory and knowledge of elders.[24] This wisdom was carried forward by the Aboriginal Interests Task Force in Western Australian heritage development, leaving an indelible and lasting transformative direction for Australian museums.[25]

The holistic approach to heritage conservation, first drawn in sand at the Crocodile Hole meeting, also had a seminal effect on the outcomes of the Nara Conference on Authenticity in Japan in 1994.[26] The 1972 World Heritage Convention was derived from a European and Western concern with protection of tangible cultural and natural heritage. The Nara meeting challenged this position, and for the first time introduced the significance of intangible heritage into the operation of the Convention. Henry Cleere, one of the most knowledgeable experts on the World Heritage Convention, argues that the instrument reflects the concern and spirit of the post war reconstruction efforts and the rapid progress with developmental projects at the time.[27] In the preamble to the Convention, the concern is universalised from the European specific context to all parts of the world. This is in many ways similar to the Hague Convention of 1954, which was drafted following the unprecedented destruction of cultural property during the Second World War. The universalised paradigm of 'development' informed largely by the success of the Marshall Plan and the resulting sensibility about poverty alleviation, was extended internationally. As Escobar argues:

> Everything that was important in the social and economic life of these countries (their population, processes of capital accumulation, natural resources, agriculture and trade, administration, cultural voices, etc.) became the object of explicit calculation by experts in new sciences developed for that purpose, and the subject of interventions designed by a vast array of newly formed institutions. In a few years, this unprecedented strategy extended its reach to all aspects of the social body.[28]

This very widely adopted post-World War II development framework also informed international cultural institutions. In contrast with this, the ethnography of resistance and 'alternative heritage' movements from scholars of the 'South', working in close partnership with their colleagues in the North, is an on-going engagement in rethinking the museum and all other heritage tools institutionalised in the post war context. Konare's intervention in Africa, the Crocodile Hole meeting, the 1994 Nara Conference, the ICOM 2002 Shanghai Charter and ICOM 2004 Declaration in Seoul have all been significant turning points in providing leadership for progressing this move towards inclusive heritage development.

Understanding heritage from the contextual standpoint and locating the First Voice requires integrated approaches to both the tangible and intangible resources as illustrated in the following diagram.[29]
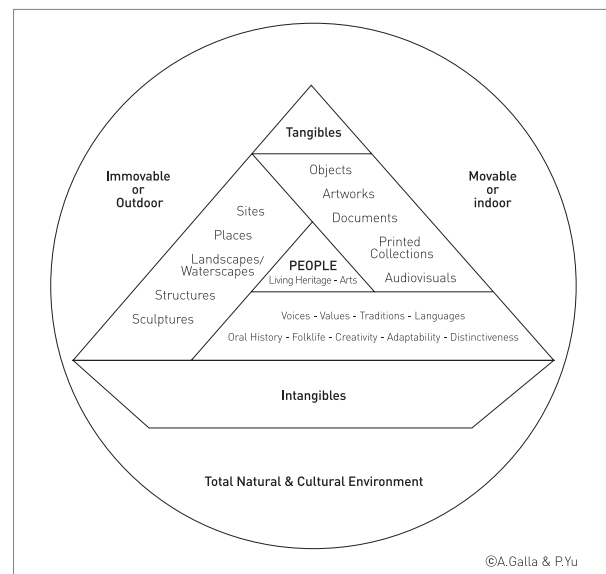

Table1
Holistic Representation of Cultural and Heritage Resources

Embedding the First Voice

Conceptual frameworks for understanding and working with the First Voice could vary in each cultural context. The underlying principles of integrity, authority and authenticity remain good indicators for assessing the way we work. While intercultural dialogue is a means to interrogating cultural diversity concerns, it is critical that the First Voice of women and the participation of young people inform all forms of change. The transformation of heritage practice can be achieved through demonstration projects where the goal is to rethink the heritage paradigm to establish holistic approaches to the conservation of heritage values at a local level.

Figure 5
Ms Nguyen Thi Tuyet, Director, National Museum of Women, Hanoi, Vietnam, argues in the ICOM Vientiane, Laos, workshop (August 2006) for gender balance in reclaiming First Voice. Photo. Amareswar Galla

Figure 6
Elsie Sheppard emphasises the centrality of the First Voice of rural women in running the Pioneer Women's Hut museum, Glenroy, NSW, in the Snowy Mountains of Australia. Photo. Amareswar Galla

One of the most impressive demonstration projects, bringing tangible and intangible heritage together through the First Voice, that I have come across in recent years is at the Cobb & Co Museum, a campus of the Queensland Museum in Toowoomba, Australia.[30] The Museum's Director, Deborah Tranter, mentions that regional museums in Australia like hers were often the 'last stop before the dump'. In transforming this situation and making her museum into a family and community-centred institution of excellence, she also embarked on another great venture - that of building the National Carriage Factory.

The Cobb & Co Museum is concerned that so many of the skills and the associated tangible and intangible knowledge behind the construction of built environment and the making of collections is being lost, if not already lost. In addition to preserving the tangible heritage, the museum has launched an innovative project to establish a training centre for 'heritage trades' focussing on the understanding and continuation of the knowledge system for productive ends. This includes training for preserving the heritage trades but also its use in the conservation and maintenance of collections.

This project points to the irony, that at a time when the heritage industry is *growing rapidly there is a dramatic decline in the trades, crafts and skills needed to maintain and preserve our heritage products and services'*. Major-General Peter Arnison, Chairman of the Queensland Museum Foundation, affirms his commitment that the Factory project *'will provide a*

meeting place for the tradesmen of yesteryear to pass over the baton of their knowledge and experience to the next generation; and we will forever actively foster the preservation of our heritage trades'.[31]

To the surprise of many people, the project has been able to generate revenue, mostly from donations and private sector, to realise this intangible heritage initiative. The most important lesson to learn from this project is that if you enagage with your local community in a relevant enterprise that brings both cultural value and economic value together, then you can end up with strong community donor support, both in-kind and cash. The ownership of the primary stakeholders is critical to safeguard intangible heritage and to do so through the First Voice of the carriers of that knowledge system.

An exemplary cultural institution that embodies the notion of the First Voice is the Vanuatu Cultural Centre and National Museum.[32] Ralph Regenvanu, Director of the Vanuatu National Cultural Council, recently said that given the 'practise and bearing of Intangible Cultural and Natural Heritage on our daily lives' museums could be critical places. He further said that museums need to learn to engage with people where 'the custodian value system is living'. One of the unique institutions in Vanuatu is the networks of men and women field workers which work in parallel with the Cultural Centre. They form a national team transcending their own cultural boundaries. They are set up to work with traditional leaders to make sure that their 'Kastom' lives on. Or in Bislama *'blong mek sua se Kastom I save laev go kasem fiuja'*.

The traditional practice of taping, documentation and photography are on the sideline as supportive tools to the actual First Voice of people annually articulated through the field workers coming together at the Cultural Centre to share and learn and above all keep the First Voice informing the very essence of the Centre as a place for presenting the sense of self of the people in Vanuatu. In the words of Kirk Hoffman, a former director of the National Museum, it is a '*living museum with living arms and legs, fingers and toes organically linking the institution with the islanders across Vanuatu. It is a mechanism for continuity of the intangible heritage that is expressed in the national language, Bislama.*' The modality of the field workers system is now being adapted by the Kanaki in New Caledonia in partnership with the Centre Culturel Tjibaou and also in the Solomon Islands through the National Museum. One of the keynote speakers at the ICOM 2004 General Conference in Seoul, Nobel Laureate Jose Ramos Horta, was keen to emphasise that the Vanuatu field workers' network system is the most relevant tool to assist the continuity of intangible heritage in his country Timor Leste at the village level with Uma Fukun, the National Museum as the hub.

For a different kind of illustration I would like to draw on a comparison between the National Museum of Ethnology, Leiden, the Netherlands and the Vietnam Museum of Ethnology, Hanoi. Both are witnesses to the transformation of museological discourse of the past decade and are concerned with 'relevance' in all its multiplicity of interpretations. Their principal concern is mapping relevance to their multiple stakeholder community groups, assessing the historical and contemporary layers of significance embedded in the collections, and providing meaningful experiences for multiple publics.

The challenges of addressing the concerns of minority groups have become central in both Europe and Asia and the two museums address this in different ways. Relationship building between collections and their source communities has paved the way for working in new and innovative ways for the Leiden museum, within the nation state and beyond, and often across geo-political regions and the world. It, like many 'museums of world cultures', has become popular contributing to new formations in European museum development. They endeavour to become windows of opportunity for

transformative learning for promoting cultural pluralism for people of all generations irrespective of their culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.

The Leiden museum is focussed on the transformation of a conventional museum established in the 19th Century. The principal driver for change is a corporate leadership that wants to make the museum and its collections relevant in the 21st Century. In the first phase of re-development the museum tried to bring together the collections derived from Dutch colonial history and their source communities across the world. In the second phase, the significance of the collections to the living heritage and voice of immigrant populations from the former colonies, is being explored through a series of demonstration projects. This is a triangulation between the collections, source communities and immigrant groups with a stake in the museum. The First Voice here is dealt with reference to the source communities but the engagement with the immigrant groups continues to be a challenge.

The Hanoi museum illustrates a new concept in museum development in the world. The starting point is the present day material culture and intangible heritage of Vietnam's fifty-four ethnic groups. The museum establishes, through research and stakeholder community participation, the contemporary cultural profile of groups and then illustrates their location in the dynamic history of Vietnam. It has become a facilitator of community-based heritage conservation among minority groups such as the Hmong. For example photo voice is used as a technique in an exemplary exhibition focussing on the Hmong through their own eyes to bring the First Voice of minority groups into the museum.[33]

The First Voice in World Heritage Areas

The globalising tendency of World Heritage inscriptions has come under scrutiny in the past decade. The concern is that the processes of nomination and assessment and the pool of expertise, mostly derived from western countries, is resulting in a homogenising negative impact in Asia and Africa. The conservation plans, which are repetitive and standardised, rarely engage with local communities or their living heritage. Some of the projects addressing these concerns are considered briefly here.[34] It is notable however, that these

inscriptions were based on limited outsider perceptions of what the local communities consider either natural or cultural values of significance to them as primary stakeholders.[35] Moreover, while the focus was on that which was perceived as heritage from the outside, local intangible heritage was ignored until collaborative corrective action was initiated by local authorities in partnership with UNESCO offices.

The developmental action plans are facilitated through systematic integrated local area planning with the primary stakeholder voice being articulated using community museology or ecomuseology methodologies. It is understood that integrated local area planning is where a community grounded approach is used to plan for an integration of resourcing, service design and delivery, within a distinct locality delineated physically in settlement terms, as well as by a community of interest. It can include planning for single issues or programs at the local level or across agencies and their programs. It can be integrated with physical planning or it can focus on social planning or cultural planning issues alone. Local area planning can be addressed across larger areas, such as local government authorities or districts, by combining a series of local area plans into one planning project.

The planning approaches taken involve full participation by the local community, drawing on local skills and expertise, and providing for empowerment of the local community through the plan's development and implementation. In developing a community based plan the opportunities to include strategies that empower local communities are prioritised, making them better able to provide for their own needs. The goal is to contribute to more effective community building, by strengthening local capacity for action. The empowerment model for local planning used in these initiatives:

• recognises that local people are well placed to know what they need
• recognises that values and priorities vary from place to place
• strategically places resources to maximise access by local people
• gives local people resources to meet their own needs
• gives control over resources to local communities
• develops the management skills of the local community.

The first case study deals with Ha Long Bay in Quang Ninh province located in the northeast corner of Vietnam. It is an area of superlative natural beauty, and is also a treasure house of unusual, and often unique, geomorphic features, ecosystems and bio-diversity. There are many sites of historical significance and archaeological remains in and around the Bay. It is also strongly represented in the myths and legends of the Vietnamese people. The natural features and the enormously complicated interaction between them and the climatic, hydrological and human influences upon them are, as yet, little researched and therefore largely unexplained. Ha Long Bay is a unique cluster of landscapes and waterscapes formed when rivers and valleys were overtaken by rising sea levels at the end of the Pleistocene or last Ice Age and during the current Holocene or Warm Period. There is material evidence of human cultures during these transitional periods of climatic history.

The Vietnamese government made Ha Long Bay a National Protected Area in 1962. It has twice been inscribed on the World Heritage List by UNESCO: in 1994 for its outstanding landscape and aesthetic characteristics, and then again in 2000 for its scientific and geological values. However, in the process of inscription the local people were neither involved nor consulted, and there was no acknowledgement of their intangible heritage. The corrective cultural action taken by the Vietnamese has been to bring together the heritage resources of the area and all the stakeholder groups into a participatory framework that is facilitated by the Ha Long Ecomuseum development. The partnership builds on the aims, interests and values that inform interpretations of community, local history and holistic environmental values, especially the intangible heritage values. The transformation in heritage practice is achieved through a series of demonstration projects focussing on intangible heritage resources identified by the local people as part of the integrated local area plan for the World Heritage Area.

One of the projects in the heart of the World Heritage Area is the Cua Van Floating Cultural Centre. Prior to the Ecomuseum development there were proposals to sedentarise the fishing communities on land. However, a detailed mapping of the heritage values of the fishing communities revealed significant intangible heritage that

not only has local significance, but also reveals a more inclusive understanding of the World Heritage Area. This living heritage of the people is now interpreted through their own First Voice with the construction and opening of the Cua Van Floating Cultural Centre and Museum in the World Heritage Area on the 18th and 19th of May 2006, as part of International Museum Day celebrations. It documents and interprets the intangible heritage values of fishing communities that live on the Bay, firstly for the local people and then for outside visitors. The curators, educators and interpreters are the local Cua Van people. The project is also critical for intergenerational transmission of local knowledge systems. While the older generation facilitated the establishment of the project, when it came to employment in the Centre they designated members of the next generation to carry the baton, while they as older community members would continue to mentor them.

A different case study is the Hoi An Ancient Town located at the mouth of the Thu Bon River in Quang Nam Province, Central Vietnam.[36] It was inscribed on the World Heritage List in December 1999, as a special example of a fully preserved traditional trading port in South East Asia. It is classified as a 'group of buildings' under Article 1 of the 1972 World Heritage Convention. Dating back to the

2nd century BC, Hoi An was an important port until the end of the nineteenth century. It was a significant centre of mercantile and cultural exchange throughout Vietnamese history. Its economic stagnation, following the development of larger ports in the twentieth century, accounts for its remarkable preservation. The street plan of the Ancient Town developed organically in response to economic and social influences. It contains a diverse range of shops, houses, communal houses, religious monuments and buildings and an open market. Most date from the nineteenth century, although many have older features dating to the seventeenth century, and are constructed predominantly of wood.

The principal threats to the Hoi An World Heritage Area come from its susceptibility to flooding, encroaching urbanisation, inappropriate tourism development and the possibility of residents seeking to capitalise on the increased value of their houses by selling them to tourism service organisations wishing to gain a foothold in Hoi An. The town was already a notable tourist attraction, but the number of visitors is increasing rapidly following its inscription on the World Heritage List.

The intangible heritage of the area is now under serious threat, given that the initial focus following

Figure 7
The Tonle Sap is the largest freshwater lake in Southeast Asia. It is adjacent to Angkor Wat in Cambodia. The voice and intangible heritage of the people who live on it is yet to be understood. A partnership with the Cua Van project is being envisaged. Photo. Amareswar Galla

inscription was on the built environment. The transformative corrective action taken is to rethink the site-centred conservation around the Ancient Town. The Ancient Town and the neighbouring villages were brought together into one integrated local area plan. This includes the surrounding countryside that has been organically linked to the development of the ancient port. In order to demonstrate the living heritage of the Hoi An District and the continuity of local heritage values, several houses that have been conserved have been adapted for re-use as museums.

The museum dedicated to an understanding of intangible heritage is the Hoi An Folklore Museum that opened in April 2005. It presents the intangible heritage of the villages and the Ancient Town as an integral part of the total heritage of Hoi An. It is linked to the surrounding villages, especially Thanh Ha Ceramic Village; Kim Bong Woodcraft Village; Tra Que Horticultural Village; Bay Mau Coco-pals in Cam Thanh Commune; and Vong Nhi Fishing Village. The artisans from these villages worked on the interpretation plan, collections and exhibits. It is significant to note that the conservation and restoration work in Hoi An is carried out using the trade skills of the Thanh Ha and Kim Bong villages. Visitors can now have a first hand understanding of their trade skills and lifestyles through the museum which has developed emphasising the First Voice of the trades' people and their community groups.

My third case study is the Darjeeling Himalayan Railway (DHR). It was inscribed on the World Heritage List in December 1999 as an outstanding example of the influence of an innovative transportation system on the social and economic development of a multicultural region. It also served as a model for similar mountain railway developments in other parts of the world. It is further stated that the development of railways in the nineteenth century had a profound influence on social and economic developments in many parts of the world.

The DHR illustrates this in an exceptional and seminal fashion. The DHR is the first, and still the most outstanding, example of a hill passenger railway. Opened in 1881, it applied bold and ingenious engineering solutions to the problem of establishing an effective rail link across a mountainous terrain of great beauty. It is still fully operational and retains most of its original

features intact. DHR is world famous for the sounds, smells and romance of a by-gone era. This is a hundred year old 'toy train' hauled by tiny 4-wheel locomotives labouring uphill at thirteen kilometres per hour, crisscrossing roads, going past rural settlements and bazaars in curves, loops, "Z's"and steep gradients for its eighty eight kilometre journey over the spectacular Himalayan landscape. For most of its length, it is a roadside tramway and its stations and buildings are easily accessible to the general public. DHR's evolution is significant both economically and in engineering terms. Numerous heritage steam railways are operating successfully in other countries and benefit their neighbouring communities.

The most significant step in the conservation of the DHR was a primary stakeholder workshop that brought together local people and workers on the Railway for the first time. In fact, the participants were surprised that the DHR, around which their lives had been built for more than a century, was inscribed on the World Heritage List. Their grandparents had built and maintained the infrastructure. There is substantial knowledge in the form of intangible heritage that is yet to be thoroughly documented and interpreted. It is only now that the voices of the local people and their family heritage are gradually informing the conversion of old railway stations into museums along the line. The intangible heritage of the 'sounds, smells and romance of a by-gone era' as well as the labour history of local people, are interpreted at museums in Ghoom, Sukna, Darjeeling and Kurseong. The intangible heritage of the famous Darjeeling tea and the deep Buddhist traditions of the local area have hardly been understood. Contextualising Darjeeling heritage through the local people is urgently needed before the 'Incredible India' campaigns and the rapid increase in visitation drown the First Voice of the local people.

Heritage Conservation - Models of Engagement

The above case studies demand changes in the way we approach museum and heritage management in general and intangible heritage in particular. This is a small sample and I am sure that there are many more excellent projects that readers will be familiar with both at work and in their personal lives. The following models of interaction in community engagement provide an overview

of the transformations that are needed. Model I is the most familiar for most people. It is a one way street with very limited engagement with the voices of people. Model II is becoming popular and there are many show and tell presentations which enable us to scope the possibilities. However, Model III is the most inclusive and challenging as it requires a mind shift in the way heritage conservation is conceptualised, understood and practiced.[37]

Project Concern	Model I Participation as Consultation	Model II - Participation as Strategic Partnership	Model III - Participation as Community Cultural Action
Who initiates the project?	Usually external researcher / specialist	Community specialist or the external researcher/specialist	Community cultural specialist/elders /curators /activists
What is the extent of community participation?	Community members or groups are informants	Community members or groups are co-workers in project development & outcomes	Community cultural control & development
What is the extent of community involvement?	Usually terminates upon the professional receiving the requisite amount of information. Characterised by limitation to the initial involvement stage	Community involvement is on-going from planning, through implementation and evaluation stages. Assumes a role for the community in joint decision making.	Community control leads to on-going community cultural leadership and cultural reclamation
Where is the location of expertise?	Expertise resides with the external agency which is empowered with the knowledge.	Expertise resides with both the professional and the community ⇨ mutual empowerment.	Expertise is part of shared community cultural heritage and values.
What is the nature of information flow and heritage communication?	One way from the community to the external professional	Al l participants generate information and contribute to joint project development; information flow is between and among all participants	Community grounded information from generation to generation with strengthening cultural self-esteem, continuity of culture and heritage
Is the process empowering?	Community is disempowered	Community is empowered to participate in the mainstream	Community is able to continue in the mainstream through self-empowerment.
Intangible Heritage	First Voice is marginalised or even silenced	Space for articulating First Voice	First Voice is the driver

Table2
Models of Engagement

The Way Forward

It has been argued that a critical reflection on museological and heritage practices over recent decades demonstrates that museums and heritage agencies are yet to develop their capacity to address intangible heritage as an integral part of their core business.[38] The 'Masterpieces of Intangible Heritage' approach of UNESCO has enabled a positioning for validation in the North-South dialogue to balance safeguarding tangible and intangible heritage with respect for the cultural diversity of humanity. Beyond this important and in many ways symbolic recognition, lies the real test for a paradigm shift, when local communities are able to have their voices heard when institutions break out of the object-centred and site/place-centred conceptual straightjackets and ensure that cultural continuity is

informed by both tangible and intangible heritage.[39]

In the 2008 Hyderabad-Araku Valley Conference, the opening keynote speaker Dr Kapila Vatsyayan, a doyen of Indian scholars on intangible heritage, challenged us to consider whether or not the transcription of intangible heritage through documentation freezes living systems into a time warp. This is the very reason why the Vanuatu Cultural Centre developed the paradigm of the field workers network to ensure the continuity of the living heritage systems. While reducing living heritage to documentary heritage could defeat the very purpose of safeguarding intangible heritage, documentation tools need to be appropriately developed as supporting mechanisms to respect and honour the First Voice of the peoples, as demonstrated by the Vanuatu Cultural Centre.

It is clearly stated in the Preamble of the UNESCO Convention on Intangible Heritage that '*the intangible heritage is fundamentally safeguarded through the continued creativity of and enactment by agents of the communities that produce, maintain and transform it*'. In dealing with the past and in the management of heritage resources we continually interpret and re-interpret objects, values and ideas from contemporary perspectives. The integration and centrality of the First Voice, that of the primary carriers of intangible heritage in heritage conservation, is therefore the most pressing engagement for all stakeholders and for the future of our collective past.

NOTES

1. Aikawa, N. 2004. 'An historical overview of the preparation of the UNESCO International Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Heritage', *Museum International*, 56 (1-2): 137-149.

2. http://icom.museum/shanghai_charter.html. Accessed 10 December 2007.
   http://icom.museum/pdf/E_news2003/extra/p10_2003-4.pdf. Accessed 10 December 2007.
   www.icom.museum

3. The use of First Voice as a tool has been advocated by quite a number of people and groups in the past two decades. Within the heritage sector notable have been Gerald McMaster, Lee-Ann Martin, Gloria Cranmer Wester, W. Rick West, Michael M. Ames, George F. McDonald, Fiona Foley and Amareswar Galla. The concept was the main tool used for the workshops in Victoria British Columbia, Canada, in 1994 as part of the International Year of Worlds Indigenous Peoples. Several of the papers from the workshop are published in, *Curatorship: Indigenous Perspectives in Post-Colonial Societies*, Mercury Series, Published by the Canadian Museum of Civilization in partnership with the Commonwealth Association of Museums and the University of Victoria, BC, 1996. Other early uses of the term and concept include: the San Francisco-based Asian-American performance group FirstVoice http://www.firstvoice.org founded in 1995, and First Voice International http://www.firstvoiceint.org , the international charity which first came to prominence with its launch of the Pan-African satellite-based Africa Learning Channel in 1999 (followed by a parallel initiative for Asia in 2004). Rosemary Joyce is a powerful advocate for the use of the term in the communication of archaeological knowledge and discoveries from the perspective of what is revealed about long-dead peoples, see her 'Introducing the First Voice' in Joyce, R. 2002. *The Language of Archaeology: Dialogue, Narrative and Writing.* (London: Blackwell). The term is also being increasingly used in wider contexts on behalf of other groups that are seen as being ignored or undervalued, as with the West London charity First Voice, which provides an advocacy service and centre for vulnerable elderly in community care (http://www.firstvoice.org.uk, while somewhat similarly the UK's Federation of Small Businesses now terms itself (and its magazine) the First Voice, as the advocate and public face of the country's 210,000 small and medium businesses that believe they have no voice within the main political and business arena dominated by major corporations.

4. With an overwhelming majority of 143 votes in favour, only 4 negative votes cast and 11 abstentions, the United Nations General Assembly (GA) adopted the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples on September 13, 2007. http://www.iwgia.org/sw248.asp accessed on 10 December 2007.

5. 61st Session of the UN General assembly, 13 September 2007, New York. http://www.nativobserver.org/statementchair.html Accessed on 10 December 2007.

6. http://www.culturepacific.org/en/bm/about_pima/pima_ethics/index.shtml Accessed on 10 December 2007.

7. http://portal.unesco.org/en/ev.php-URL_ID=39604&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html Accessed on 10 December 2007.

8. UNESCO. 2002. *Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity: A Document for the World Summit on Sustainable Development*, Johannesburg, South Africa, Cultural Diversity Series No.1. Paris.

9. Tagore, R. 1981. 'A Poet's School', Visva-Bharati Quarterly, October 1926. Re-produced in *Vision of India,* Indian Council for Cultural Relations, New Delhi, pp. 20-32.

10. Material from Vietnam informed some of the proceedings. Galla, A. 2001. *Guidebook for the Participation of Young People in Heritage Conservation*, UNESCO, Hanoi.

11. Appadurai, A. 2002. *Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity: A Document for the World Summit on Sustainable Development*, pp. 9-16.

12. International Council of Museums, 1991. *What Museums for Africa?* Benin, Ghana and Togo.

13. African National Congress, 1994. *The Reconstruction and Development Programme*, A Policy Framework, Johannesburg; N. Magau. 1995. 'Beginning Where We Are: Arts, Culture and The RDP', in Bringing Cinderella to the Ball, *Proceedings of the National Conference of the National Arts Coalition*, Johannesburg: COSAW Publishing & National Arts Coalition, pp.16-19; G. Metz, 1995. 'Museums in a Democratic South Africa: Building on a Heritage of Struggle', *Museum National*, Vol.3, No.3, pp.7-10; A. Galla, 1995. 'Bringing Cinderella to the Ball: Museums in a New South Africa', *Museum National*, Vol.3, No.4, pp.8-10.

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16. Hamilton, C. 2002. "Living by Fluidity": Oral Histories, Material Custodies and Politics of Archiving' in Carolyn Hamilton et al. (eds), *Refiguring the Archive*, Cape Town: David Philip Publishers; H. Bredekamp. 2005. 'Oral History, Museums and Communities: a view from the Cape of Good Hope', Keynote presentation for the conference *Can Oral History Make Objects Speak?*, Nafplion, Greece, October 18-21, 2005. See also P.B. Rekdal. 2004. 'Living Intangible Heritage', *ICOM News*, No. 4, p.21.

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28. Escobar, A. 1988. 'Power and Visibility: Development and the Invention and Management of the Third World', *Cultural Anthropology*, Volume 3, Number 4, p 430.

29. Galla, A. 1995. 'Authenticity: rethinking heritage diversity in a pluralistic framework', *Nara Convention on Authenticity in Relation to the World Heritage Convention*, World Heritage Bureau, UNESCO, Paris, pp. 315-322.

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