



ARTICLE TEMPLATE

As a guideline, it is suggested that the text be structured with an abstract, keywords, introduction, items (and sub-items, if appropriate for each article), conclusions or final considerations and references. GSEN

TITLE

Heritage Conservation Standards in the Global South: Is the Venice Charter Still Relevant?

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ABSTRACT

The Venice Charter (VC) adopted in 1964 was a response to the long-standing call among largely Western Europe's architectural heritage movement, which included Pier Gazazlo et al, in the Global North (GN), for an internationally accepted framework for defining ancient monuments and sites and the provision of guiding principles for their preservation and restoration. ICOMOS was founded in the following year to promote the VC. Both, the Charter and ICOMOS were framed within Western ideology about cultural heritage to undertake conservation in post-world war Europe. The Global South Exchange Network (GSEN) – a collective comprising individual ICOMOS members from the GS and members of the GS living in the GN, formed in November 2023, regards this framing of the VC to have inevitably resulted in Eurocentric policies, structures and processes. Consequently, they lack relevance for the conservation of heritage in the Global South (GS) with diverse cultural, social and spiritual values and expressions relating to place and nature, rather than just monuments. GSEN is also of the view that ICOMOS' regional instruments, such as the Nara Document and the Burra Charter created to reflect differing social, cultural and spiritual values in conservation, while responding in small part to the complexities of GS' needs, have had limited impact. Furthermore, ICOMOS' ad hoc efforts to draw attention to Indigenous rights and rights-based approaches and its



occasional capacity building efforts are still in the main led by “experts” from the GN, and their attempts to ‘empower’ the GS is from an external viewpoint. This historical development of ICOMOS and the evolution of the organisation, which has continued in a western ideological mold, have inevitably provided a strong platform for the GN to project a confident and seemingly co-ordinated collective voice on heritage and conservation. In contrast, the GS’s voice on heritage conservation has been diverse, multiple, disparate and incohesive, and often overshadowed by a colonial past and political realities. Professionals in the GS have not had similar opportunities as their counterparts in the GN to undertake collective and systematic interrogations of the relevance of VC to their diverse heritages in the GS where 85% of the world’s population lives. GSEN submitted a proposal to ICOMOS Board to formalise GSEN’s role and status to deliver the following objectives aimed at equalising the status and role of the GS with that of the GN: (i) a scrutiny of existing conservation principles and construct a new conservation theory for ICOMOS’s multicultural and international profile; (ii) establish a collective voice and self-representation by the GS; (iii) create research, training and development resources and repositories in the GS; (iv) promote a transversal South-to South Co-operation as defined by the United Nations. GSEN’s panel presentation at the AGA scientific symposium was a response to the board’s advice to consult on the proposal with the wider ICOMOS family. This article summarises the proceedings of the panel presentation. It comprises an introduction, definition of GS, and six presentations which focus on GSEN’s four key objectives with recommendations for adoption by ICOMOS. The terms GN and GS are framed within the UN’s definition, and GS refers to countries in: Africa, Asia and Pacific, Arab and Latin America and the Caribbean regions.

Keywords: Venice Charter; Burra Charter; Nara Document; Global South Exchange Network (GSEN); Eurocentric; United Nations; Global North and South; collective-voice; self-representation; South-to South-Co-operation; development resources and repositories;

INTRODUCTION

On 21 November 2023 ICOMOS’s President, Teresa Patricio called an extraordinary meeting of the ICOMOS Advisory Committee – which consists of presidents of ICOMOS National Committees (NCs) and International Scientific Committees (ISCs). The objective of the meeting was for the ICOMOS Board “to share the work of the Board and to see how the National Committees (NCs), International Scientific Committees (ISCs) and Working Groups (WGs) can contribute on matters pertaining to their expertise” in responding to armed conflicts. At the meeting, some individual members, largely from the GS and those from the GS living in the GN, expressed concerns over the lack of consistency in the way ICOMOS responded to armed conflicts across the globe which was brought into sharper focus by perceived differences of ICOMOS’s handling of the Russian and Ukraine and Israel and Palestine wars. They also reiterated their previous observations about differences in attitude and speed of response by ICOMOS, and the quantity and quality of evidence that were required for the issuing of robust statements calling for the cessation of war and breach of humanitarian law and the protection of cultural properties in relation to these two, almost identical, situations. In concluding the meeting, Teresa Patricio invited ideas from attendees which would help improve ICOMOS to meet all its members’ needs. On 22nd November, Clara Arokiasamy submitted her idea for the creation of a Global South Exchange Network (GSEN). Eight individual members representing Africa, Arab, and Asia regions, including three with



roots in the GN as well, expressed support for her proposal and GSEN was born. At the request of the President of ICOMOS, GSEN members submitted a short proposal paper to the March 2024 Board meeting setting out definition of GS, the rationale for a group such as GSEN and how it would enable ICOMOS to identify and address North-South differences and inequalities and thereby enhance its international status further, and recommended that the board approved GSEN as an ICOMOS working group. In its response, the Board advised GSEN to consult the rest of the ICOMOS family on the proposal. GSEN's panel presentation at the AGA scientific symposium formed a key consultation process. This article sets out briefly GSEN's panel presentation which comprised a definition of GS, its *raison d'être* couched in four objectives, including the need to deconstruct Eurocentric conservation policies underpinned by VC principles, and six individual presentations which illustrated one or more of GSEN's objectives, and recommendations.

DEFINITION OF GLOBAL SOUTH

Carl Oglesby coined the phrase "Global South" in 1969. It does not refer to a geographical location, but rather to countries historically categorised as "developing", "underdeveloped", or "third world" countries, usually countries that had experienced colonisation. These terms were considered derogatory and Eurocentric. GS and GN were adopted as more acceptable alternatives. For the framing of this article, the "GS" encompasses countries in Africa, Asia Pacific, Arab, Latin America and the Caribbean.

WHY IT IS IMPORTANT TO ADDRESS GLOBAL SOUTH ISSUES AT ICOMOS – FOUR KEY OBJECTIVES

Drawing on over 100 years of collective knowledge, experience and conservation expertise GSEN members, through extensive discussions, identified four key objectives. These objectives aim to ensure equal participation and influence from Global South NCs and individual members within ICOMOS. This equitable approach is crucial for ICOMOS to truly reflect its international character and enhance its global impact.

The need to reconstruct Eurocentrism

i. The need to reconstruct Eurocentrism

For over 60 years, much of ICOMOS's structures conservation policies and processes have been influenced by post war conservation in Europe, rooted in western ideology. The Venice Charter has served as an international benchmark for heritage conservation for six decades has been shaped by the Eurocentrism conservation of the widespread destruction during the Second World War, followed by rapid economic development, post-war reconstruction, and the modernisation era (Hardy, 2008). The Burra Charter and the Nara Document, while aiming to address diverse social, cultural and spiritual values, have had limited impact in practice. ICOMOS's efforts to address indigenous rights, rights-based approaches and capacity building are primarily driven by European members. Despite being held as international standards, ICOMOS' doctrinal framework and practices inadequately reflect the needs of the GS. This situation is exacerbated by significant underrepresentation of GS members within ICOMOS. While constituting about 40% of the total membership, many GS nations lack representation, and individual representatives often lack the influence to effect meaningful change within ICOMOS structures and activities. Consequently, GS perspectives and experiences are often marginalised within ICOMOS, with Eurocentric views dominating discussions and shaping policies. This leads to the



adoption of concepts and models ill-suited to the GS context. Consequently, GS members often remain silent or become passive participants, particularly when challenging dominant narratives from GN colleagues regarding the experiences of GS cultural heritage. ICOMOS's rhetoric about addressing the North-South divide and concerns over the resulting inequalities are insufficient. The recent global conflicts and shifting world order and emerging issues for GS cultural heritage necessitate a more robustly focused dialogue among GS professionals within their own contexts. GSEN offers a valuable opportunity for ICOMOS to adapt and embrace the changing times by welcoming GSEN in shaping the future of heritage conservation. **The need for a collective voice and self-representation in the GS**

The GN enjoys significant influence within international heritage conservation, largely due to the European origins of major organisations like the UN, ICCROM, ICOM and ICOMOS. This has resulted in a strong cohesive voice that champions GN interests, even during crises. GN professionals assume authority to speak on GS cultural heritage. In contrast, the GS voice is fragmented. There is generally limited connectivity between ICOMOS NCs whose membership numbers are often poor. This has resulted in a lack of comprehensive data on its diverse cultural heritage and consequently hinders the development of compelling evidence-based arguments and limits the GS's ability to advocate for culturally sensitive and appropriate conservation approaches during times of peace and crisis.

ii. The need to create GS 's own research, training and development resources and repositories

A significant portion of research and documentation on GS is held within institutions in the GN, a legacy of colonialism. Unfortunately, this trend continues through development aid, post conflict reconstruction and research programmes, often disadvantaging GS scholars and institutions. Furthermore, unequal access to digital technology exacerbates this imbalance, further empowering the GN in shaping the understanding, and interpretation of GS cultural heritage.

ICOMOS should also consider the significant presence of the GS diaspora and migrant communities, within the GN, and their impact on cultural heritage in the North when addressing cross-cutting issues like climate change, cultural diversity, and rights-based approaches.

iii. The promotion of transversal South-to-South Co-operation for sustainable development

Ad hoc efforts between NCs in the GS and GN have mainly focused on building capacity and improving GS members' representation within ICOMOS structures. However, no formal evaluation of their impact exists and the results appear to be minimal. These efforts do not meet the growing demand for decolonisation of cultural heritage, self-sustainability and self-determination in the GS, making a case for South-to-South cooperation, which frames GSEN. The UN describes the South - South cooperation as "a process whereby two or more developing countries pursue their individual and/or shared national capacity development objectives through exchanges of knowledge, skills, resources and technical know-how and through regional and inter-regional collective actions, including partnerships involving Governments, regional organizations, civil society, academia and the private sector, for their individual and/or mutual benefit within and across regions. South-South cooperation is not a substitute for, but rather a complement to, North-South cooperation." It is essential to highlight that GSEN possesses the expertise, contacts, and networks both within and outside of ICOMOS to effectively coordinate the development and implementation of all four objectives. Additionally, they have a keen understanding of how and when to draw support from GN.



SIX PRESENTATIONS

The following six presentations are illustrations of one or more of the above GSEN's objectives.

Author: Kian Boon Tiong

The Venice Charter in Transition?

For 60 years, the Venice Charter (VC) has guided the World Heritage community. Despite its accolades, some in the GS have questioned its relevance. The GS was absent from the Charter's formulation and adoption debates. The VC has served well but GS cultural heritage experts largely viewed cultural heritage issues through GN perspectives. However, more experts and practitioners are now trained locally, engaging with stakeholders and custodians who hold cultural narratives and practices. The lack of recognition of this layer of cultural discourse is increasingly frustrating.

Comparisons with later Documents

In 1994, the Nara Document (ND) on Authenticity highlighted the cultural distinctiveness of the Asian, particularly East Asian, cultural ethos and understanding. It recognised the diversity in cultural heritage, which leads to interpretations of Authenticity and Cultural Values. The Document did not dismiss the principles of the VC ; rather, it encouraged discussions on values and authenticity within the context of specific cultures.

In its opening paragraph, the VC introduced the dual concepts on which World Heritage is based and why.

"Imbued with a message from the past, the historic monuments of generations of people remain to the present day as living witnesses of their age-old traditions. People are becoming more and more conscious of the unity of human values and regard ancient monuments as a common heritage. The common responsibility to safeguard them for future generations is recognized. It is our duty to hand them on in the full richness of their authenticity".¹

The Charter does not define "Authenticity"; rather, it outlines the principles, and provides guidance addressing diversity in cultural conservation. For many non-Indo-European cultures, one of the most contentious segments in the Charter is "All reconstruction work should however be ruled out "a priori".²

While this statement was contextual in the text, several practitioners have implemented it based on the letter and not the spirit of the principle. This, despite the attempt to set the framework for the Charter in its introduction: "It is essential that the principles guiding the preservation and restoration of ancient buildings should be agreed and be laid down on an international basis, with each country being responsible for applying the plan within the framework of its own culture and traditions"³.

If authenticity is seen in the VC as no rebuilding **a priori**, then the Ise Shrines will never pass muster to be inscribed as World Heritage. The Ise Shrine is dedicated to the worship of the sun Goddess, Amaterasu. Tradition requires that it be rebuilt every 20 years as part of the Shinto belief in *tokuwaka* (常若), which signifies the renewal of objects to maintain a strong sense of divine prestige in the pursuit of eternity and in a practical way pass down the building techniques from one generation to the next. The attributes of authenticity are carried by the shrine structures and more importantly by the tradition, and process, of rebuilding. The intangible aspects of authenticity are of greater value than the physical

¹Opening paragraph, Introduction to the Venice Charter

² Venice Charter – Article 15 third paragraph Opening sentence.

³Venice Charter, Introduction, Second paragraph.



attributes. The present buildings are the 62nd iteration and the next rebuilding will be in 2033. There is no denying that the ethos of rebuilding and the intangible ideas underpin and give substance to the practice and in turn lift the practice and the product of religious dedication above the ordinary.

There is a lack of appreciation and flexibility in the interpretation and implementation of the VC especially in the context of World Heritage. The VC was never meant to be a dogmatic document. There is little or no appreciation for what is authenticity and its handmaiden, integrity, in world heritage interpretation embedded in cultures from the GS.

It can be argued that the authors of the VC did not intend such inflexibility. The ND provides a reasonable interpretation of values and authenticity (paragraphs 9-13). A similar or more advanced interpretation within the context of the VC may be necessary to make it relevant for the GS.

10. The ND affirms the correctness and continued relevancy of the Venice Charter; it is not a revision of the VC.⁴

The Burra Charter (BC) of 1979 aimed to create a new tool for heritage assessment, recognising cultural heritage beyond tangible forms. Despite suggestions that the BC could replace the VC, the BC's four revisions since its inception highlight the Venice Charter's enduring value.

To reiterate Michael Petzet in his review of the VC on occasion of the 40th anniversary, there must be a pluralistic approach to preservation and must meet the *demands of contemporary society*.⁵

Author: Aurelio Sánchez Suárez

A Specific Charter for Mayan Cultural Heritage: Is Mexico's Example the Way Forward in Managing Indigenous Heritage in Latin America?

A Charter for Mayan Heritage: Mexico's Example for Managing Indigenous Heritage Management

Sixty years after the VC, new local charters for Mayan cultural heritage have enhanced our understanding of cultural and natural heritage. However, the universality of heritage may not fully represent the heritage of Indigenous peoples, especially when viewed through the lens of ICOMOS and UNESCO charters and conventions. These tools are often developed by specialists external to the local villages without involving the local inhabitants.

This presentation examines the development of a heritage charter for indigenous peoples who have been traditionally 'othered' by outsiders whom the communities now regard as the 'others'. It addresses key questions such as: who are the heritage specialists? How can those who do not own or inhabit tangible heritage or a space gain an understanding of it? What is ICOMOS' ethical stance regarding Indigenous peoples?

⁴ Nara Document, Paragraph 10: *Authenticity, considered in this way and affirmed in the Charter of Venice, appears as the essential qualifying factor concerning values. The understanding of authenticity plays a fundamental role in all scientific studies of the cultural heritage, in conservation and restoration planning, as well as within the inscription procedures used for the World Heritage Convention and other cultural heritage inventories.*

⁵ Principles of Preservation (Chapter VI opening paragraph)



We have been colonised through European science and beliefs since the Spanish arrived in Mexico. Our knowledge, our ways of thinking, our relationship with nature, our beliefs, and our very existence in this world was questioned, censored, and criminalized by the colonisers. Mexico's independence did not solve this problem but prolonged it by maintaining the shame imposed on our Indigenous identity. Today, although Mexico recognizes itself as diverse and multicultural, the relationship of interculturality has been purely functional; government, civil society organisations and universities often seek personal gains from their relationships with indigenous villages and their people.

The indigenous peoples of Mexico, particularly the Mayan community, have continuously resisted colonialism to preserve their identity. They seek a more critical intercultural relationship that must first acknowledge the centuries-long colonialism they have endured and its impact on their lives in general and their cultural heritage specifically.

So, how can universities and civil society organisations create fair and morally responsible relationships with Indigenous peoples?

The answer to this question was realised in collaboration with Canadian First Nation colleagues at Lakehead University, Ontario, working on the research project: "*Working together towards self-determination: Indigenous research and data governance in Canada, Ecuador, and Mexico.*"

Using the Mayan methodology for dialogue, called '*tsikbal*', we engaged in deep discussions to understand each other, analyse our realities and address our people's issues. This process fostered mutual trust through our shared struggle to defend our territories. With this trust established, colleagues from the Autonomous University of Yucatan invited Mayan representatives from the states of Campeche, Yucatan, and Quintana Roo. These representatives included activist territory defenders, philosophers, knowledge keepers, and creators of audiovisual content. Other allies of the Mayan people also collaborated in this effort.

We exchanged thoughts, experiences, and struggles, discussing colonialism's manifestations through universities, foundations, and civil society organisations. This process enabled us to extract our cultural legacies and create reflections, which we agreed to make public through the creation of the 'Canicab Charter' (CC). This document, written up and approved by all involved, has empowered Mayan organisations and other Indigenous peoples to engage in extractive projects.

The 'Canicab Charter' stands in defiance against colonialism, rejecting the notion of 'otherness/outside' imposed by outsiders. It highlights the ability of the Global South to create their own culturally relevant charters relevant, breaking free from colonialist models and actions.

Inspired by the spirit of the CC, and as part of the research project: "*Study of indigenous people's philosophy for inhabiting the territory, cultural landscape, vernacular and biocultural knowledge*", academics from various institutions in Mexico, led by the Autonomous University of Yucatan and the National Autonomous University of Mexico, held *tsikbal* with other Indigenous Hñähñu, Ikoots, Maya, Mè'phàà, and Nahua, communities on philosophical thinking for inhabiting their territories. The project was funded by Mexico's National Council of Humanities, Sciences and, Technologies'.

Horizontal methodologies with a focus on critical interculturality to create dialogue of knowledge and



declinability were used for this project. Additionally, a multidisciplinary team was established to promote scientific discussion from a transdisciplinary perspective, with the purpose of enriching and expanding the disciplinary visions. This required utilising existing methods from the disciplinary fields of architecture, ethnography, and ecology for the development of activities at each stage of the project. We found qualitative methods to be most appropriate to develop a transdisciplinary approach, in particular, grounded theory, which allowed us to explore key concepts from the distinct disciplines and led to definitions based on the philosophical premises of the indigenous peoples.

The result of the dialogues of knowledge carried out with the Indigenous communities was a system of philosophical thought, systematized and concretized in a new co-creation document between academia and Indigenous peoples: 'The Charter on Philosophical Thought in Cultural "Heritage"'.

Mexico's indigenous people's philosophical thoughts do not categorise their cultural legacy. Instead, they link cultural manifestations, material and immaterial, to think about their territory, establishing life cycles. They differ from the Eurocentric thought which is based on material existence. This contrasts sharply with Mayan life cycles, where vernacular architecture has to die and disappear to generate a learning scenario with the construction of a new house, and thus perpetuate knowledge through thousands of years. In this sense, a Mayan house is not 60 or 80 years old; each house built carries the validity of more than three thousand years of existence.

The above is just one example of how different indigenous peoples' thoughts are from those expressed in the many doctrinal charters from the Global North. Except for the Nara and Burra Charters, ICOMOS' doctrinal texts, including the Venice Charter, are limited in reflecting how indigenous peoples express their cultural legacies.

The Canicab Charter is a document that makes visible what could not be included in the international charters that have preceded it. It is also a step forward in the co-creation of charters between Indigenous peoples, Indigenous academics, allied academics and ICOMOS members. The Charter is a step in reverse 'otherness' where the outsiders who have come in to manage indigenous cultures for centuries and ICOMOS and the Global North are 'othered' - the beginning of a new dialogue, that we are obliged to have, a historical debt to settle!

It is high time for the Global South to generate its decolonial methodologies and charters, with co-creation processes, to be adopted by ICOMOS to care for the indigenous cultural heritage and legacies.

Author: Bijan Rouhani

Digital Reconstruction of The Global South's Cultural Heritage: What Are The Principles and Who Are the Beneficiaries?

Shaped by post WWII reconstruction and modernisation, the Venice Charter promotes the universality of heritage values, emphasising "the common responsibility to safeguard them for future generations." This concept, originating in the 1954 Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict and formalised in the 1972 World Heritage Convention,



underpins the development of international principles to guide preservation and restoration.

Six decades later, while many of the principles of the VC remain relevant—such as applying scientific and technical methods for studying and safeguarding architectural heritage, preserving setting, respecting original materials, and acknowledging the value of all historical periods, new challenges and advances in technology necessitate a thoughtful reassessment.

The rise of digital technologies for documenting and reconstructing cultural heritage has broadened the potential for heritage conservation and research. These technologies not only minimise physical interventions at historical sites and structures in alignment with Venice Charter principles, but they also enhance access to cultural heritage.

In 2020, the ICOMOS General Assembly declared a Climate and Ecological Emergency, acknowledging the adverse impacts of climate change on cultural heritage⁶. The negative effects of climate change are particularly severe in developing societies in the Global South and marginalised communities. Simultaneously, the devastation caused by armed conflicts in regions like Southwest Asia, North Africa, and other parts of the Global South has severely damaged all forms of cultural heritage. This urgency has heightened the race to preserve endangered cultural heritage, especially as digital technology and artificial intelligence offer new tools for documentation, which is now a principal approach to safeguarding these sites.

Numerous digital reconstruction projects have focused on the cultural heritage of Syria and Iraq, many initiated or funded by institutions in the Global North (Rouhani, 2023). While these initiatives align with the Venice Charter by avoiding alterations to original materials and irreversible interventions, they also raise significant ethical concerns. Local communities often do not benefit directly from these efforts, nor are they involved in decisions about what should be digitally reconstructed, how data should be collected and stored, or what narratives and interpretations should be presented.

This prompts several key questions: Will digital documentation and reconstruction, particularly in complex social and political contexts, replace physical conservation and preservation? Will global audiences, both researchers and the public, become less reliant on direct access to the cultural heritage of Global South communities? Furthermore, which heritage will be prioritised for digital representation, and which will be excluded?

Augmented Reality (AR) and Virtual Reality (VR), powered by artificial intelligence (AI), transform our interaction with spaces and artefacts, changing how we perceive, analyse, and discuss heritage. This raises essential questions about the connections these technologies create between physical heritage and its digital counterparts, as well as between material culture and its digital representations, particularly in the context of Indigenous heritage (Giordano *et al.* 2021).

Questions about the authenticity of digital reproductions of cultural heritage—whether they are genuine digital representations or merely virtual “fakes”—can provoke philosophical debates (Di Giuseppantonio Di Franco, Galeazzi, and Vassallo 2018). In the context of digitally recreating and representing contested or damaged cultural heritage, ethical considerations take on new

⁶ <https://www.icomos.org/en/focus/climate-change/85740-icomos-declares-a-climate-emergency#:~:text=The%20planet%20is%20at%20a,a%20Climate%20and%20Ecological%20Emergency> [Accessed 03 Jan 2025]



complexities: What guidelines and standards should be adhered to? Who gains from these efforts? What is the primary purpose of digital reconstruction? These issues are notably pertinent in the Global South, where cultural heritage faces heightened risks due to conflict, climate change, and development pressures.

Limited access to technology in the Global South can contribute to the digital divide and lead to digital colonialism. These regions, influenced by a colonial legacy of exploitation and misrepresentation, encounter similar challenges as digital technologies and AI introduce new forms of control and influence, reminiscent of colonial practices.

Digital technology enables more immediate access to cultural heritage through digitisation, information retrieval, and archives, sometimes via web scraping, to aid reconstruction efforts. This prompts important considerations regarding intellectual property rights and economic benefits. While digital reconstruction can preserve memories of lost heritage when physical restoration is not feasible, it raises the question of whether local communities are included as stakeholders in these projects.

In recent years, there has been a fundamental shift towards viewing cultural heritage as an evolving process, influenced by social, political, economic, and environmental factors. However, if the context—including the community presence and perspective as well as the surrounding environment—is removed, reducing heritage to a detached entity in a virtual space, then 3D models and immersive environments may oversimplify and distort the true complexity of cultural heritage and its context.

In the Global South, numerous initiatives led by local individuals and organisations aim to leverage digital technology for safeguarding and documenting endangered heritage. However, many of these efforts depend on digital tools and infrastructure owned and managed by major technology corporations. These companies provide essential services such as cloud servers, computing systems, storage and visualisation tools, effectively centralising control over the digital infrastructure and economic gains derived from digital cultural heritage.

Established in the post-World War II era, the Venice Charter was rooted in Eurocentric cultural perspectives. Over time, as global dynamics have shifted and new challenges have emerged, advancements in technology have reshaped the theoretical frameworks for understanding, interpreting, conserving, and restoring cultural heritage. Today, digital technology and AI are revolutionising nearly every aspect of life, including culture and heritage. These transformations are especially significant in the Global South, where the digital and technological divide, coupled with the legacy of colonialism, amplifies the complexity and visibility of their impact on cultural heritage.

Ethical considerations in digital heritage span areas like access, data management, documentation, visualisation, copyright, and the risk of misuse. Without a universal framework for digital cultural heritage, current guidelines should outline principles for an inclusive and ethical approach. This framework should address the purpose of digital reconstruction, its context, equitable access, collective benefit, diversity, and inclusiveness, ensuring communities and individuals have their rights and voices at the centre (Rouhani, 2023). Rapid advancements in technology will bring new challenges that require ongoing adaptation.



Author: Ishanlosen Odiaua

The promotion of South-South Cooperation for Sustainable Cultural Heritage Development: Benefits for ICOMOS and NCs in the Global South

South-South cooperation is a broad-based framework that addresses the exchange of resources, technology, and knowledge between developing countries. It builds on the realities of shared experiences for mutual benefit of the cooperating partners. Global South countries are present in Asia, Latin America, the Middle East and Africa and represent over 80% of the global population.

The UN fosters South-South cooperation in recognition of the potential that it holds for the attainment of the SDGs, and other global compasses. It is born out of shared experiences and sympathies, based on the common objectives and solidarity, and the principles of respect for national sovereignty and ownership, free from any conditionalities.

Applying the UN approach, South-South cooperation in ICOMOS could help address existing inequalities in how cultural heritage management is addressed by ICOMOS. This goes beyond declaring that a “priority” region as is often claimed for Africa. A possibility is one in which ICOMOS could establish a mechanism to enhance transversal collaboration between national committees of knowledge, skills, resources and technical know-how in GS. Countries of the Global South share similar challenges, in varying degrees, regarding the conservation of cultural heritage. There are some success stories despite the challenging operating environments. This could be done through regional and interregional collective exchange could be scaled up for true impact, based on an understanding of how to achieve desired results with very little resources. Sharing experiences could also help NCs address the issue of getting known by the relevant authorities in-country, a challenge which was shared in the 2023 annual reports.

The COVID pandemic was a test for how South-South cooperation can be instrumental in meeting challenges within similar contexts, as we saw with the case of vaccine production and distribution.

In a time when climate change is a global issue, South-South cooperation could be critical for dealing with climate change mitigation and adaptation.

Many Global South countries are home to local communities who are custodians of knowledge systems that have helped them survive over the centuries in harsh conditions. These knowledge systems are often closely tied to traditions and cultural practices. This knowledge is specialised within its context, representing some of the highly technical skills in the societies from which they come. . ICOMOS could make a deliberate effort to facilitate the exchange between NCs from the Global South to develop a body of work that ICOMOS could lead on.

The UN also promotes the concept of **Triangular cooperation** in which partnerships are driven from the South. Applying this in the ICOMOS context, this could involve NCs from the Global South defining their own needs and world view regarding heritage conservation concepts and principles for protection, and having support from NCs from Global North, multilateral agencies or NGOs to implement such programmes. The key word here is “driven”: it should be demand-driven so that it responds to real needs on the ground. With its suite of charters and guiding texts (from Venice to Burra to Nara, etc.), ICOMOS can better drive the process. For example, the consideration of local heritage, which is the heritage of the people and is the baseline from which WH is nominated, and notions of authenticity and integrity. It would also require a rethink of the ‘expert’ separation between intangible and tangible heritage, which is foreign to many cultures in the Global South – where the intangible gives meaning and significance to the tangible.



ICOMOS aspires to be a global reference cultural heritage practice, and at the cutting edge of addressing the nexus of emerging issues such as the management of cultural heritage faced with armed conflict and the impacts of climate change. It is thus important to leverage its presence in 113 countries to provide leadership in the sector. This international presence provides the possibility to create a global vision of heritage conservation and management that is at once proactive and responsive. This service can be tailored to local needs while addressing global challenges. We can be at the cutting edge of addressing the nexus of emerging issues such as the management of cultural heritage faced with armed conflict, development pressures and the impacts of climate change, by listening more to the voices from the field.

By actively encouraging Global South exchange, ICOMOS can: (i) promote collaboration between National Committees from the Global South; (ii) develop and expand triangular cooperation in which NCs from the Global South drive partnerships with NCs from the Global North; to (iii) develop solutions for cultural heritage that address the specific needs of the Global South and are ultimately beneficial at a global scale.

Author: DR Hossam Mahdy

Development and Reconstructions in the Global South: Reflections on the Relevance of the Venice Charter in the Islamic World

As an Egyptian, I was disturbed by the fact that the VC deemed Egyptians, who are African, Arab, and Muslim all at once and a traditional and conservative society, to be less committed to the conservation cause than the liberal, secular non-conservative European communities.

In my view, a key threat to the heritage of Egypt and other nations in the Islamic world (and one shared by many other GS nations also), is the reference to and attitude towards local communities by heritage conservation professionals from secular backgrounds. For example, when external secular professionals conserve a historic mosque, a key concern is the protection of the mosque site from vandalism and theft by the local Muslim community. A proportion of the project budget is thus allocated to fencing, security and monitoring systems. This assumption, an integral part of conservation, automatically stereotypes local communities as vandals and thieves. It also negates the Muslim peoples' agency, innate concerns for their heritage and traditional values and the reverence they attach to their places of worship. Therefore, when the final evidence of a successful conservation project is produced, the question should be, for whom is it successful - the secular outsider or the communities to which the land and the monument belong? Thus, demonstrating the need to examine the fundamentals of conservation practice in the VC to ensure they are befitting of the societal values in the GS.

It is a testament to its impact, that after 60 years, the VC continues to underpin other ICOMOS doctrinal texts, namely, the Guidelines on Education and Training in the Conservation of Monuments, Ensembles and Sites (1993) and the Charter on the Built Vernacular Heritage (1999). Both refer to the general high-level principles in the Charter. On the other hand, subsequent guidance in the Burra Charter (BC) and Nara Document (NC) on Authenticity have challenged the relevance of the VC's central notions, the concepts of a historic monument, ancient buildings and materiality of authenticity. Although the BC and ND were created for national use, they became relevant internationally, particularly in the GS, as they addressed values and attitudes that the VC ignored. But it worth bearing in mind, that the preamble of the VC proposes that "It is essential that the principles guiding the preservation and restoration of ancient buildings should be agreed and laid down on an international basis, with each country being responsible for applying the plan within the framework of its own culture and traditions." Thus, leaving the door open for local interpretation within local cultural contexts including the Islamic



World which needs to be expedited by ICOMOS with the GS.

There is an urgent need for a robust discussion about the application of VC conservation principles in the Islamic World focussing on Islamic values and worldview as part of a strategic decolonisation process. The term 'Islamic World' here refers to Islamic Civilisation and not the religion. Documentation of Islamic architecture in architectural books is not confined to just mosques but also houses markets, hospitals, fortifications, water management structures. Elements that are classified as "secular architecture."

European colonisers and elites imposed conservation principles based on philosophical debates during the 19th and 20th centuries and imposed it on the GS as the ultimate solution of the "modernization project". It failed to pay any regard to local contexts or culture-specific intellectual history and conservation practices and therefore lacked relevance for indigenous peoples and local communities in the GS. The impact of this trajectory led to the 12 centuries old conservation philosophies being dismissed by modern heritage professionals in favour of the rationale and approach in the VC and subsequent conservation documents.

Additionally, the Islamic waqf arrangements, an efficient and sustainable conservation and management system, responsible for the survival of the many Islamic historic buildings to date, was deemed less progressive compared to the VC principles. This distanced the conservation discourses and practices from local communities and governments' priorities governed by local Islamic values and holistic worldview which do not separate the tangible from the intangible, the movable and the immovable, the cultural and the natural, the religious and the secular. In contrast, the national governments, have continued with the European legacies left behind by their colonisers, including forced relocations, imposed sanitized restoration of the tangible while suppressing the intangible and moving the movable heritage to museums.

Unlike the GN, the priority for many Muslim majority countries is to mitigate the destruction of ongoing armed conflicts and human suffering, such as those being witnessed in Sudan, Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria and Lebanon or outright genocide as in the case of Gaza and the rest of Palestine. As for those Muslim-majority countries that enjoy peace, their priority is development and the improvement of their living conditions. How could the Venice Charter be relevant to peoples' values and worldviews in these situations?

Given its European historical roots and context of the VC, its relevance to the GS will not be fully understood until the privilege of the GN is removed. I believe that the starting point should be to acknowledge that European cultures and values which produced the VC are not universal, even if they are globalized, due to past and current colonialism!

Author: Alyssa Barry

Power to the Youth: South to South Transversal Youth Engagement and Cooperation Towards African Cultural Heritage - Alyssa K. Barry (ICOMOS EPWG Africa)

Africa's 400 million youth population is the youngest in the world and is set to double by 2030. They represent the present and the future of the continent. So, who better than them to ensure the preservation and perpetuation of Africa's cultural heritage.



In recognition of this demographic detail, the following international cultural institutions in Africa and globally have made youth in Africa as a priority group and have created initiatives to support them.

- The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) initiated the World Heritage Young Professionals Forum (former World Heritage Youth Forum) in 1995, and the first African World Heritage Youth Forum in 1996 (later led by the African World Heritage Fund – AWHF);
- The International Centre for the Study of the Preservation and Restoration of Cultural Property (ICCROM) launched the Youth.Heritage.Africa programme in 2020;
- The African Heritage School (EPA) implemented the Youth Museum Forum in 2023.

The key objective underpinning the above initiatives is empowerment which enables the young people to contribute to the sustainable preservation of their heritage and derive benefits from it.

In 2017, ICOMOS' 19th General Assembly adopted 'Resolution 19GA 2017/33 – Emerging Professionals Initiative'. This led to the establishment of the Emerging Professionals Working Group (EPWG). Its objectives were to foster the participation and integration of emerging professionals within ICOMOS to maintain the scientific relevance of ICOMOS for future generations; to foster intergenerational engagement to ensure the continuity of the organization; and to share ICOMOS ethical principles from the earliest stages of education.

ICOMOS' EPWG comprises six regional groups and each has a coordinator. Since the establishment of the EPWG Africa, three countries have provided coordinators, Ethiopia, Nigeria and Senegal respectively. The current 62 members represent African 21 countries, including two from the North African Arab States. The group works very closely with ICOMOS Africa and has made the development and delivery of its work in its own mold encouraging transversal collaborations between the states and NGOs and other relevant bodies. It is one of the most active EPWG and its objectives set in 2022 are as follows:

- Creating and facilitating a network of emerging heritage professionals from Africa and its diasporas;
- Sharing of information, knowledge or know-how of African heritage;
- Making African emerging professionals and their determination to be involved in African heritage visible

The EPWG Africa has implemented several initiatives which have promoted the above objectives. The key one was 'What's News'⁷, a monthly bilingual newsletter produced by the Bureau and published from May 2022 to December 2023. The main aim was to share information and knowledge about African cultural heritage and showcase the work of emerging heritage professionals in and outside of Africa. Its varied content included interviews with emerging and senior professionals and a special

⁷ All issues of the newsletter are available at <https://www.icomos.org/en/about-icomos/committees/regional-activities-africa/108221-what-s-news-past-newsletters-of-the-icomos-epwg-for-the-africa-region>



interview with the champion for the preservation of African cultural and natural heritage, President of the Republic of Cabo Verde, articles on African heritage sites or attributes, and a monthly compilation of activities and initiatives dedicated to African cultural heritage. Twenty issues were published in English and French with, special editions in Portuguese and Arabic, thus representing Africa's linguistic diversity. In total, over a hundred actors, initiatives, institutions, events and opportunities related to African cultural heritage have been highlighted through this newsletter.

Other initiatives included a webinar titled "Heritage in the Hands of African Youth – Sharing initiatives" as part of the annual African World Heritage Day celebrations. The last in this series in 2023 was delivered in partnership with ICCROM through its Youth.Heritage.Africa programme. In total, the webinar has allowed to present 12 initiatives from Africa and the diaspora so far⁸.

ICOMOS EPWG has demonstrated that with nothing more than passion, will and determination, African emerging professionals can empower themselves to do great things in their own way. African emerging professionals must know how to seize opportunities, but above all where to find them both inside and external to the formal heritage institutions in Africa and inside and outside of Africa.

The EPWG Africa is also a successful example of transversal engagement and capacity building between NCs, heritage institutions and NGOs in Africa. EPWG Africa's, youth engagement and cooperation towards African cultural heritage deserves to serve as a model to be replicated on a larger scale within the GS.

CONCLUSIONS

The Venice Charter created six decades ago was shaped by the need for reconstruction and modernisation of Europe, post WWII. Its principles are rooted in Western ideology. It also promotes the universality of heritage values a concept originating in the 1954 Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict and formalised in the 1972 World Heritage Convention which underpins the development of international principles to guide preservation and restoration. The GN has led the implementation of the VC with little or no input from the GS. The Burra Charter and the Nara Document have attempted to meet the concerns of the GS with limited impact.

Since its creation six decades ago, new challenges have emerged that impact the GS with greater adversity. Climate change, the rise of new technology, damage to cultural heritage caused by the long-term and new armed conflicts and civil wars, decolonisation of cultural heritage, Indigenous peoples' rights, rights-based approaches, South-South cooperation and calls for self-determination and self-sustainability by the South impact conservation and safeguarding of heritage in the GS and the GN where large number of migrants and diaspora communities from the GS live. These critical

⁸ African Digital Heritage (Kenya), AfroArt Studio (Ghana), AN2PS (Senegal), Archéo-Groupe (Senegal), Ateliers d'Alger (Algeria, France), Citizon (Morocco), Eco-musée Tata Somba (Benin), Patrimundus (Benin, Cameroon, France), Sacral Architecture Africa (Brazil, Switzerland), Shédio Design Solution (Algeria), Somali Architecture (Somalia), Sounds of Freedom (Kenya)



developments with far-reaching consequences for the GS necessitate an urgent and thorough reassessment of the VC.

ICOMOS' current structures and doctrines created in the mold of the VC, and whose membership and working methods lack adequate input from its members in the GS has struggled to respond to these challenges appropriately. Thus, perpetuating the Eurocentric approaches to conservation.

GSEN's proposal is timely and a great opportunity to redress the inequalities and imbalances which have characterised ICOMOS for the last 60 years and thereby create a truly international ICOMOS whose conservation standards are relevant to all those who are engaged with heritage conservation.

Going forward, the GSEN Collective will continue to engage with the GS and GN on its objectives to create a better understanding of the GS's needs and a responsive ICOMOS.

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