

# Assessing the South African city as a cultural landscape



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*In 1992 the World Heritage Committee, the administrative body for the World Heritage Convention (WHC), adopted a definition for cultural landscapes of outstanding universal value. The members agree that ‘Cultural landscapes represent the combined works of nature and of (hu)man, illustrative of the evolution of human society and settlement over time, under the influence of the physical constraints and/or opportunities presented by their natural environment and of successive social, economic and cultural forces, both external and internal.’<sup>1</sup>*

To define cities as cultural landscapes may be contradictory to the WHC statement. For instance, the US National Park Service document titled *Cultural Resource Management Guideline NPS 28*<sup>2</sup> reads that ‘A cultural landscape is a geographic area, including both cultural and natural resources and the wildlife or domestic animals therein, associated with a historic event, activity, or person or exhibiting other cultural or aesthetic values.’ It identifies four types of cultural landscapes: historic designed landscapes, historic vernacular landscapes, historic sites, and ethnographic landscapes, describing the latter as a landscape containing a variety of natural and cultural resources.

The national Australian Heritage Commission (AHC) recognizes the unique position of indigenous heritage. Indigenous people were the first Australians. The AHC states ‘Their heritage is intimately linked with the landscape, beliefs, and customs. Indigenous people perceive the natural environment as a cultural landscape which is the product of human activities over at least 60 000 years – time immemorial. Indigenous heritage includes those cultural landscapes and places, intellectual property, knowledge, skeletal remains, artefacts, beliefs, customs/practices, and languages that are important to Australia’s indigenous people’.<sup>3</sup>

Definition of ‘place’ in the International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS) New Zealand’s new Charter for the Conservation of Places of Cultural Heritage Value also emphasises the important earlier concept of Australia’s Burra Charter (1998.22). It states ‘place means any land, including land covered by water, and the airspace forming the spatial context to such land, including any landscape, traditional site or sacred place, and anything fixed to the land including any archaeological site, garden, building or structure, and any body of water, whether fresh or seawater, that forms part of the historical and cultural heritage of New Zealand’.<sup>4</sup>

A comparison of the definitions shows that currently a city or a landscape can only be judged to be culturally significant if it is based on human activities and

influence to give it a cultural significance. This may be true, when we continue to use the term ‘culture’ to describe the relationship between people and landscapes. Even the definition of the Aboriginal landscape seems to have been written with a ‘western’ approach of a division between culture and nature. Descriptions of African cities and landscapes often suffer the same westernised approach that demonstrates a lack of appreciation for multiplicity and diversity.

Maybe in time we will be able to form a better understanding of the enigmatic relationship between people and the landscape they live in and with which they identify themselves. However, for now, cultural heritage, and therefore our cities, is universally understood to be those ideas, things, and places we have inherited from past generations and that we desire to leave as our legacy for future generations. Cultural heritage is important because it helps us to define who we are, where we have been, and where we are going. A people without a tangible, visible, knowable past are indeed poor, no matter how many contemporary riches they may possess. Preserving one’s cultural heritage is an important aspect of preserving one’s culture itself. Cultural heritage includes language, belief systems, knowledge, and ideas, as well as the more tangible places and things. All aspects of culture interrelate, so it is important to understand that one cannot change one part of a culture without it stimulating changes in many other aspects of culture. Cultural heritage includes not only the built environment of buildings, bridges, and other human constructions, but also the affected landscapes near such structures.

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A report entitled United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) – *Recommendation Concerning the Protection, at National Level, of the Cultural and Natural Heritage 1972*<sup>5</sup> introduces the notion of a living environment that encompasses the health and heritage of communities as a requirement for fit living conditions for humans.

To achieve a heritage rich living environment in South Africa, communities are encouraged by the national and provincial heritage agencies, to identify and bring the landscapes and places they value to the attention of the authorities. In addition, institutions, educational bodies and other interested parties are preparing motivational statements as part of the identification and registration process of the cultural and biophysical heritage of the country. Unfortunately, most heritage studies in South Africa have focussed on the western historic and cultural landscapes. These studies have made an important contribution to the cultural landscapes knowledge in South Africa. The majority of such research has been concentrated in the major metropolitan areas associated with universities such as Pretoria, Cape Town, Durban, Port Elizabeth and Bloemfontein. Also, the majority of work has been completed in the field of architecture and other urban structures or artefacts. Little research work has been done on developing an understanding of an authentic contemporary South African cities paradigm and its cultural foundations or its ever changing nature.

In recognition of these limitations, new and innovative adaptive management techniques are currently being developed by national and international organisations to more appropriately manage indigenous natural and cultural ecologies.<sup>6</sup> In the last

ten years cultural landscape management tools and techniques that can suitably address cultural ecologies in the current South African have been developed. These supplement the current understanding by combining African cultural perspectives with the western approach, and thus amalgamating the various cultural attitudes.

This contemporary (2000s) approach recognises that:

- It is possible to distinguish between cultures.
- The peculiarities among cultures make them definable.
- Cultures have varied values for varied landscapes.
- Cultures express their peculiarities both tangibly and intangibly.
- Communities are able to express their individual values and the things they value.
- Values, and that which is valued, may be distinctive from one community to another.
- Associative relationships are formed between communities and the biophysical environment they inhabit.

To be effectual in its context, the manner in which cultural landscapes, our natural environments and our cities are described and examined, must be implementable at various levels, from local-, to provincial-, to national level. It must meet the requirements of assessment, evaluation, and management and must be applicable to

South African cultures while keeping in mind that the cultural landscape could be tangible as in the physical manifestations of our cities, or intangible such as stories, natural or cultural, and movable or immovable heritage.

*These can be summarised as heritage that is living or intangible, historic, cultural, palaeontological, scientific, technological, emotional, religious or spiritual, ancestral, artistic or adorning, military or conflict, archival, geological, contextual or unique.*

The preamble to the National Heritage Resources Act strives to encourage communities to nurture and conserve their legacy. This notion is focussed on the identification and management of cultural heritage from a local level. The idea that heritage or culture can be institutionalised is rejected for an approach that

puts the power of systematics in the hands of the concerned citizens, or special interest group. To strengthen this idea, the NHRA also allows for any person to submit a nomination to South African Heritage Resources Agency, or a Provincial Heritage Resource Agency, for a place to be declared a national or provincial heritage site.<sup>7</sup> To comply with the NHRA the terms must fit into a category as determined by the NHRA. These can be summarised as heritage that is living or intangible, historic, cultural, palaeontological, scientific, technological, emotional, religious or spiritual, ancestral, artistic or adorning, military or conflict, archival, geological, contextual or unique.

In compiling a national estate, or a local and provincial, heritage list, the challenge lies in the ability to recognise the heritage for inclusion. To assist in the identification of those places that may currently be considered, the NHRA<sup>8</sup> requires a Provincial Heritage Resources Authority (PHRA) to identify those places that have special qualities that makes them significant. According to the Act, those are heritage resources that could be considered as culturally significant or of other special value. It is suggested that the evaluation procedure be completed together with the classification procedure to establish in a related manner the category, the significance and the grading to be national, provincial and local.

Table 1. Criteria for evaluation of place and city significance against proposed NHRA categories.

Items and criteria for evaluation of significance and value	a) its importance in the community, or pattern of South Africa's history;	b) its possession of uncommon, rare or endangered aspects of South Africa's natural or cultural heritage	c) its potential to yield information that will contribute to an understanding of South Africa's natural or cultural heritage	d) its importance in demonstrating the principal characteristics of a particular class of South Africa's natural or cultural places or objects	e) its importance in exhibiting particular aesthetic characteristics valued by a community or cultural group	f) its importance in demonstrating a high degree of creative or technical achievement at a particular period	g) its strong or special association with a particular community or cultural group for social, cultural or spiritual reasons	h) its strong or special association with the life or work of a person, group or organisation of importance in the history of South Africa	i) sites of significance relating to the history of slavery in South Africa
a) places, buildings, structures and equipment of cultural significance									
b) places to which oral traditions are attached or which are associated with living heritage (intangible)									
c) historical settlements and townscapes									
d) landscapes and natural features of cultural significance									
e) geological sites of scientific or cultural importance									
f) archaeological and palaeontological sites									
g) graves and burial grounds, including	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
i. ancestral graves									
ii. royal graves and graves of traditional leaders									
iii. graves of victims of conflict									
iv. graves of individuals designated by the Minister by notice in the <i>Gazette</i>									
v. historical graves and cemeteries; and									
vi. other human remains which are not covered in terms of the Human Tissue Act, 1983 (Act No. 65 of 1983);									

h) sites of significance relating to the history of slavery in South Africa									
i) movable objects, including	N/A								
i) objects recovered from the soil or waters of South Africa, including archaeological and palaeontological objects and material, meteorites and rare geological specimens									
ii) objects to which oral traditions are attached or which are associated with living heritage									
iii) ethnographic art and objects									
iv) military objects									
v) objects of decorative or fine art									
vi) objects of scientific or technological interest; and									
vii) books, records, documents, photographic positives and negatives, graphic, film or video material or sound recordings, excluding those that are public records as defined in section 1(xiv) of the National Archives of South Africa Act, 1996 (Act No. 43 of 1996).									
Total for each criterion out of a possible 20 points.									

Management decisions taken by the City officials or the councils, should consider with Table 1 as a guide, both the natural and cultural characteristics and features of the cities, the dynamics inherent in natural processes and continued use, and the concerns of traditionally associated peoples to the landscapes of our cities. The focus of urban management should include the following: safeguard significant physical attributes; secure significant biotic systems; manage significant uses when those uses contribute to significance. Decisions for expansion and modification should be based on a cultural landscape’s significance, and thus the place’s and the city’s significance, over time, on the significant existing conditions, and on sound preservation practices to enable long- term preservation. The treatment implemented should be based on sound maintenance practices to enable long-term sustainability of the inherent qualities and materials. The management approach must emphasise that the future utilisation of cities should be viewed according to cultural and natural sustainability in terms of its economical interests, according to cultural and natural sustainability in terms of its recreational interests, and its conservationist interests.<sup>9</sup>

A management plan is required for each site listed on a local level, on a provincial level and on a national level. A Heritage Resource Management Plan (HRMP) as herein suggested, must meet the criteria of sustainability.

The first step to a HRMP for cultural landscapes is the preparation of a conservation policy. As stated in the Guidelines to the Burra Charter<sup>10</sup>, the conservation policy should identify a management structure through which the conservation is

capable of being implemented. It should identify those who are to be responsible for subsequent conservation and management decisions and for the day to day management of the place; the mechanism by which policy decisions are to be made and recorded and the means of providing security and regular maintenance for the place.

Following the management requirements, any city's development and management policy should set out the way in which the implementation of the conservation policy will or will not change the place including its setting; affect its significance; affect the locality and its amenity; affect the client, owner and user; and affect others involved. The implementation strategy of the city should be an essential part of any management planning. The strategy should adhere to the following principles as suggested under the Land Care South Africa programme: <sup>11</sup>

- Provide a framework for individuals, community organisation and the public and private sector, through partnerships to optimise productivity and sustainability of the natural and cultural resources through management, protection and rehabilitation.
- Develop the capacity and skills of land users through education, knowledge sharing, information, participatory interaction for better access and management of resources.
- Support institutional building at all levels of governance for improved communication, networking, financial and other support services.
- Empower all people through knowledge and understanding to take the responsibility for the care of the natural and cultural resources.
- Ensure as far as is practicable that resources are used at a rate within their capacity for renewal
- Maintain and enhance the integrity of natural and cultural systems.
- Minimise or avoid risks that lead to irreversible damage.
- Maintain biodiversity (contribute towards the maintenance of biodiversity).

As part of the monitoring and maintenance program, it is necessary to set, enforce, and monitor carrying capacities to limit public visitation to, or use of, cultural resources that would be subject to adverse effects from unrestricted levels of visitation or use. This should include:

- reviewing the conservation area purpose;
- analyzing existing visitor use of, and related impacts to, the cultural resources and traditional resource users;
- prescribing indicators and specific standards for acceptable and sustainable visitor use; and
- identifying ways to address and monitor unacceptable impacts resulting from overuse.

The United States of America National Park Service<sup>12</sup> recommends three types of treatment for extant cultural landscapes: preservation, rehabilitation, and restoration. These should be considered based on the desired outcome of the management strategy.

- Preservation. A cultural landscape should be preserved in its present condition if that condition allows for satisfactory protection, maintenance, use, and interpretation; or another treatment is warranted but cannot be accomplished until some future time.

It is suggested to rephrase the term “preservation” to ‘safeguard’ since preservation may be interpreted as being similar to “canning it”, which in turn mortifies the landscape or place. It is the intention to keep the cities “alive” and to ensure the continuous use of the significant places (cultural landscapes)

- Rehabilitation. A cultural landscape may be rehabilitated for contemporary use if it cannot adequately serve an appropriate use in its present condition; and if rehabilitation will retain its essential features, and will not alter its integrity and character or conflict with approved park management objectives.

It proposes to amend the rehabilitation option in that the place or landscape may be rehabilitated for contemporary use while it retains its authenticity and integrity of character and significance.

- Restoration. A cultural landscape may be restored to an earlier appearance if all changes after the proposed restoration period have been professionally evaluated, and the significance of those changes has been fully considered; if it is essential to public understanding of the park’s cultural associations; and if sufficient data about that landscape’s earlier appearance exist to enable its accurate restoration; and the disturbance or loss of significant archaeological resources is minimised and mitigated by data recovery.

It is proposed to amend the restoration option with the suggestion that together with SAHRA or PHRA the group or individual that initiates the heritage procedure identify the most appropriate time period for restoration.

In conclusion it can be said that cities that are managed as cultural landscapes are a response to the desires of peoples to know their heritage and to keep that heritage in a managed and maintained manner. These associative cultural landscapes, while rooted in land, focus recognition of values not only on design or material evidences, but also on the spiritual significance of place. In some landscapes, material evidences and design decisions relating to them will be prominent, but the spiritual values of the place may be equally important. The cosmological and mythological associations of sacred places and the continuing cultural relationship to the spirit and power of these places characterise many cities to indigenous and other people in many parts of the world. Narratives and place names bequeathed from generation to generation relate these spiritual associations directly to the land. Traditional life, rooted in intimate knowledge of the natural environment, focused on seasonal movement, patterned by movements of animals, food products of the land, marine resources and hunting. Kinship, social relationships, and reciprocal obligations linked people in this complex manner that has sustained it for centuries. The inter-connectedness of all aspects of human life with the living landscape – in social and spiritual relationships as much as in harvesting are, and remain, continuously rooted in the cultures and the land.

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NOTES

- 1 UNESCO, 1996
- 2 (<http://www.nps.gov/planning/petr/appdxg.htm>).
- 3 Australian Heritage Commission, 1997
- 4 New Zealand Department of Conservation, 1998
- 5 [www.unesco.org](http://www.unesco.org)
- 6 See In Conservation Ecology. Oregon State University, University of Montana, Australia, Canada,
- 7 Office of the President. National Heritage Resources Act. 1999. Item 27(3)
- 8 Office of the President. National Heritage Resources Act. 1999. Chapter II, Part 1, 27 (2)
- 9 [http://www.sdu.dk/Hum/ForandLand/English/Goals.htm#5/15/01\\_5:24:22\\_PM](http://www.sdu.dk/Hum/ForandLand/English/Goals.htm#5/15/01_5:24:22_PM)
- 10 Guidelines to the Burra Charter: Conservation Policy. Australia ICOMOS. 25 May 1985
- 11 Resource Conservation and Quality Control. February 1999. IMPLEMENTATION FRAMEWORK FOR THE LANDCARE PROGRAMME. Department of Agriculture
- 12 USA. National Park Service. 2000 Management Policies. Chapter 5: Cultural Resource Management. <http://www.nps.gov/refdesk/mp/chapter5.htm> 21/06/01 19:35.