

# INTRODUCTION

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The Area of Research Strength in 'Heritage Studies' at the University of Otago held a select symposium of international and national scholars in Dunedin at St Margaret's College on 30 June and 1 July 2005 to discuss cultural heritage management with a particular focus on conflict. The interpretation of cultural historical places and associated remains as public heritage or 'cultural patrimony' is an increasingly contested, and even violent space on occasion. Prominent examples of recent note include clashes over Judaeo-Christian and Islamic sites of significance in Jerusalem, and the destruction of the Moghul mosque at Ayodya, India, the Mostar Bridge in the former Yugoslavia, and the Buddhist statues at Bamiyan, Afghanistan. There is national and international tension over the repatriation of important archaeological collections or monumental remains such as the Elgin Marbles and over the return of historical or archaeological human remains to Native American, New Zealand Maori and Australian Aboriginal communities. Claims for redress by indigenous communities against post-colonial governments increasingly involve cultural heritage sites or objects.

One key problem which leads to conflict in any assessment regarding the value of historic landscapes is the failure to recognize and reconcile the multiple values associated with specific places. Clearly, interpretations of our heritage differ according to one's particular viewpoint, discipline or methodology. These differing approaches to modern cultural heritage practice and interpretation are evident in history, archaeology, socio-cultural anthropology, social geography, resource management planning, and indigenous studies. Moreover, the combination of 'place' and 'history' or 'geography' and 'events' is a potent mixture, which lends itself to endless variations of interpretation. These interpretations are, in the end, subjective and many have proven to be controversial. What makes a place historic should encompass the question of recording and interpreting history contextually. It is the fabrication of contexts which determines the process of historical interpretation when it is applied to traditional or archaeological sites, buildings and structures. The context may embrace a single event, or a series of events; it may represent the nucleus of a geographic place, or be associated with a noted individual or group. A landscapes approach offers a holistic framework, which recognizes the inter-relationship of both the tangible and intangible elements of heritage.

The value of a historic site lies in the knowledge we have of it and how we interpret or contextualise that knowledge. This is not always easy. Although we know that we should promote the material culture which exemplifies characteristics of everyday life, it is an inescapable fact that just as the average person seldom leaves behind detailed archival sources such as diaries or memoirs which would directly register his or her major concerns, the cheaply built structures of the poor seldom last as well as the masonry buildings of the elite. As a result, the heritage built on wealth, privilege and education looms larger in the landscape than that of the commonplace, which does not. Inevitably, an unbalanced view of the past has been conserved and protected and this needs to be rectified.

In any society there is not a single context but a series of contexts at a variety of spatial scales which allow different individuals and groups, depending upon how much access to power and other resources they have, to differentially arrange and modify these different contexts. The poor and less affluent have an impact upon the immediate context of their neighbourhoods while the rich and powerful may leave their mark at the national or even international level. Regardless of the power of different cultural groups, they all create cultural landscapes to varying degrees and interpret them from their own perspectives. This gives rise to tensions and contradictions. A socio-spatial dialectical approach is useful to understanding cultural landscapes. Whilst a term such as 'historical' suggests a link to human actions, individual and collective, the term 'spatial' or 'landscape' typically evokes the image of something physical and external to a social context. Traditionally, space is a context for society, a container, rather than a structure created by society. Nevertheless, human ideas are expressed in behaviour which then creates cultural landscapes. These landscapes, in turn, affect behaviour and ideas in endless causal loops: cultural landscapes dialectically show cause and effect. Social and spatial relationships are dialectically inter-reactive and interdependent. Cultural landscapes reflect social relations and institutions, and they shape subsequent social relations. While elites create spatial inequalities and homogeneity simultaneously through their hegemony, non-elites create counter-hegemonic landscapes which reflect their own values. Behavioural resistance to the dominant culture leads to distinctive cultural landscapes: for example, cultural resistance by Maori.

Indeed, dominant ideologies such as those which are religious, political, economic, ethnic or racial, continually define or redefine 'deviance' or 'otherness' to maintain their power and landscapes of dominance. Space and place are key factors in the definition of deviance and of order and propriety.

The symposium provided an opportunity for dialogue and reflection on themes of conflict in the contemporary management of cultural heritage. Speakers at the symposium incorporated theoretical and empirical approaches, and considered case studies of cultural heritage conflict and/or some of the fundamental causes of such conflict, including the emergence of new or revived cultural identities and politics.<sup>1</sup>

I am very grateful to Paul Ashton and Paula Hamilton for agreeing to publish this special edition of *Public History Review*.

#### **ENDNOTES**

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<sup>1</sup> Mr Greg Vossler's article, incorporated in this volume, was not part of the original symposium series, but has been included here to provide the legislative framework for dealing with cultural heritage in New Zealand.