

TO SIGNIFY, TO DOCUMENT, TO CONSERVE

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ABSTRACT:

Documentation efforts are deeply rooted in the construct of significance—or worth, an underpinning premise for protecting heritage resources in the first place. Beginning at the level of building, the normal sequence of events would involve a series of steps that handle justifying the intent to conserve, determining a strategy of intervention, planning and implementing surveys, and planning and implementing the intervention. The proposed sequence of events described above can be a helpful framework for disputing or articulating positions about the relationships of existing built-environment resources, their signification, and decisions regarding their documentation and conservation. Therefore, this paper had set out to a) review international appreciation of the built-environment resources as a celebratory mechanism of history and culture of the place; b) discuss international conservation community's signification (recognition) of new categories of heritage resources, and; c) examine the impact of this recognition on doctrinal principles and legislations for resource information and documentation. Conspicuous among several conclusions of this paper is that the need to identify the newly appreciated cultural resources, to signify them, and to conserve them placed commensurate demands on the conservation field's function of information collection and documentation; the implications on research, survey, recoding, and dissemination in relation to these needs are vast. This paper will add to our understanding of the phenomena of public appreciation and professional signification and their capacity for shaping conservation interventions, and more importantly information and documentation decisions.

1. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Beginning at the very inceptive level of a single environmental resource item such as a building or bridge, the normal sequence of events would involve a series of steps. These include a) summoning the item (the presumed intent of conserving the resource); b) justifying the intent to conserve (rendering reasons to conserve epitomized by the measure “significance”); c) determining a strategy of intervention into the structure (such as rehabilitation or restoration), d) planning and implementing survey and documentation (in response to the item's assigned significance, purpose of intervention, among others); and e) planning and implementing the intervention. The proposed sequence of events described above can be a helpful framework for disputing or articulating positions about the relationships of existing built-environment resources, their signification, and decisions regarding their documentation and conservation.

This paper probes the genesis of significance as a conservation agent, the signification process, and the implications of the construct on concomitant documentation and conservation efforts. As such, the paper will entertain thoughts and advance arguments in three ways:

- Reviewing the concept of international appreciation of the natural and built-environment resources as a celebratory mechanism of history and culture of the place
- Discussing the international conservation community's signification (recognition) of new types of heritage resources

- Clarifying the implications of this recognition on doctrinal principles and legislations for resource information and documentation.

Because the issues of this paper are closely dealt with by international organizations such as ICOMOS, UNESCO, and the European Union, reference for works by these entities where made mainly using website citations.

The commonalities and differences amongst the various forms of survey and documentation carried out on behalf of cultural resources stem primarily from the purpose of documentation—to preserve, adapt, archive, and so forth. As simplistic as this statement may be, the fact remains that any purpose of documentation and by extension of heritage conservation in general, is entrenched in the value that conservationists ascribe to the cultural resources under consideration. This paints the role of the documentation function in reconciling the value of the cultural item and the purpose of documentation. Ascribing values to cultural resources, called here “signification”, comes out of a process in which a set of bearing measures (criteria) of value are applied through a structured appraisal protocol. This section revisits the notion of significance and touches on the cultural heritage signification phenomenon in a historical, philosophical sense.

The inseparability of documentation function from the conservation process makes it difficult to differentiate the motives of one from those of the other. The perceived worth of a historic asset, the intent to act (conserve), and the inevitable need to understand (document) all mold into a sequence. In a holistic sense, the growing international appreciation of history and the environment have had its sway felt on the cultural

resources in terms of at least two dimensions: what (kind) and how much (magnitude). In this vein, such influence ironed out refinements in the prevalent conventional definition of resources. Imposing monuments and flamboyant mansions gave way to humble but likewise significant items, such as vernacular architecture or rural bridges, to share the embodiment of historic meaning of the place. In the last few decades of the 20th Century, conservation thought moved away from the single monument mentality to embrace history and geography of resources in a holistic sense. As a result, sensible indigenous concepts of heritage have been courted (Powell, 2000). An all-encompassing definition of heritage resources emerged giving birth to new cultural entities including historic towns, cultural landscapes, and the like. An all-encompassing definition of heritage resources emerged giving birth to new cultural entities including historic towns, cultural landscapes, and the like.

2. COMMULATIVE TYPES OF HERITAGE RESOURCES

The persistent trend for defining cultural resources has eventually come up with still resource types that are limited only by the imagination of the thinkers and workers in the field. The conservation community had to reckon with a spectrum of newly formulated cultural categories including, among others, cultural routes, underwater heritage, and polar heritage. These additions have posed unique identification, inventorying, and intervention challenges that conservation knowledge and practice apparatuses are, to date, not fully prepared for. Cultural Routes (CR) and Underwater Heritage (UH) are the cultural categories discussed below in support of this Section argument.

2.1 Cultural Routes

A cultural route is a geographically defined pathway of human movement that evolved and functioned in fulfillment of a collective purpose. Its worth is derived from the proven reciprocal circulation along its trajectory, but more importantly, from the exchange of knowledge, commodities, and values of locales and countries that it traverses. Serving economic, political, military, or spiritual ends, cultural routes are valued foremost for their intrinsic role in bringing together, for a sustained period of time, diverse peoples to interact, and thus, to ponder knowledge, beliefs, and events beyond the spatial realm of separate indigenous communities. In origin, cultural routes emanate from a conscious plan or from a gradually evolving process step-by-step weaving and supporting a purpose (ICOMOS, Charter on Cultural Routes 2008).

Appraising the values surrounding a cultural route begins with the understanding of its tangible physical and spatial elements. In its abstract sense, a cultural route can be taken as a linear course with limit points at the two ends and a horde of natural, pastoral, or urban “places” in between. The course may tread water bodies, descend to valleys, or climb mountains, but in all cases still threads through the intermediary places integrating their physical elements and contextual characteristics into a collectively synthesized whole. These places may include custom houses, storage facilities, travel depots, garrisons, bridges, sacred grounds, town centers, rest areas, inns, harbors, and so forth.

Cultural routes are desired entities within and across nations, regions, and continents (UNESCO, WHC, 1994). The European Cultural Routes program was initiated by the Council of Europe in 1987. Concrete steps on triggering this concept took place in the early 1990s principally by the UNESCO and the Council of Europe (advocating European Cultural Routes). In this vein, some of the earliest attempts at applying CR establishment studies include “The wine and the vine routes in the Mediterranean Cultural Heritage (1999)” and “the Public Works of the Camino of Santiago in Galicia (2000). Some countries followed suit in terms of developing their own national networks of CRs. Switzerland, for example, has now the Cultural Routes of Switzerland, a two-group collection of CRs on historical paths linking “local initiatives, cultural and natural scenic attractions, and offers of regional specialties.” (2009).

2.2 Underwater Heritage

Underwater heritage encompasses all vestiges of human history and culture that are wholly or partially submerged by water for no less than 100 years (UNESCO, 2001). These vestiges originate in the human settlements abutting water including structures, objects, and human remains; or in the transport function in water bodies including all types of vessels and their shipments. In either case, the natural context is inseparable part of the vestige sphere of evidence. An offshoot of maritime archaeology, cultural heritage associated with water is also called “maritime heritage,” within which historical and archaeological resources are the two distinct components: “Historical resources are those objects which remain in place to remind us of historic activities such as lighthouses, navigation markers, or historic wharves, docks and piers. Archaeological resources are the remnants of humankind’s quest, whether it be prehistoric trash middens buried under meters of sediment or a shipwreck collapsed upon itself on the seabed.” (NOAA National Marine Sanctuary Program, 2007).

Maritime heritage is exposed to hazards largely unique to the aquatic environments. Shoreline development, treasure hunt voracity, and natural seabed subsidence are prevalent causes of risk to resources. Ironically, “the single most important factor for preservation is rapid burial by sediment. A cover of sediment protects both the artifacts themselves and their spatial patterning from destruction by water and marine organisms” (Stewart, D., 1999). Development projects and looting exploits intensify as a result of unabated, but otherwise speculatively pursued, technological advancements (The European Union Culture 2000 Programme, 2007).

3. IMPLICATIONS ON INFORMATION AND DOCUMENTATION

Echoing the international unabated appreciation of the past, newly added types of resources impacted the information and documentation broadly in terms of doctrinal policies and implemental practices. Policies and legislations dealing with resource protection in general or with resource information and documentation in particular were enacted ushering directly or indirectly to implications on the information and documentation function in the overall context of conservation for the newly emerging resource types. This impact is explained below in relation to cultural routes and to underwater heritage.

3.1 In Relation to Cultural Routes Information and Documentation

Information acquisition and management regarding cultural routes can be understood in terms of either of two broad endeavors, identification and protection. The first is associated with establishing the cultural route identity and making the case for its cultural value; the second is associated with actions of all sorts that contribute in a way or other to the all-encompassing sphere of protection. This distinction can be gleaned from the doctrinal texts appearing first in the early 1990s to the more mature 2008 ICOMOS Charter on Cultural Routes.

The Charter addresses research and information plainly in its leading objective: “To establish the basic principles and methods of research specific to the category of Cultural Route....” (ICOMOS Charter on Cultural Routes, 2001). The Charter also calls for development of knowledge, alluding to research and documentation for pre- and post identification purposes. Further, it eloquently articulates the role of information and inventories in evaluating the authenticity and integrity of cultural assets, and subsequently asset significances—through the signification process.

Because of their extensive expanses and complexities, cultural routes are highly demanding in terms of the information needed to justify their *raison d’être*, namely, to make, through the signification process, enough of a strong case for them to come to being. The establishment of a CR in a country or (more often) across countries ushers to a prospect of information collection and interpretation in support of implementation, *per se*. Necessitating a high level of coordination amongst jurisdictions along the path, the verbal, visual, and graphic information needed for heritage asset identification, planning, and intervention projects will be as varied and as thorough as the CR goals go for. “The research methodology, along with the adoption of practices and the attachment of indicators for proper identification and assessment of the heritage values in the different sections of a Cultural Route, should never lose sight of the meaning of the Route as a whole, in order to avoid any loss in the meaning or historic significance of the route” (ICOMOS Charter on Cultural Routes, 2008).

The facet of research and information documentation associated with CRs reflects in the studies that the International Committee on Cultural Routes (CIIC/ICCR) has carried out to advocate, in the first place, the advent of the CR as a viable area of human heritage. At the very incipient level, the Committee assembled a series of guiding groundwork “records” dealing with the very definition of a cultural route entity, holistic framework for describing the CR project, and the legal and administrative requirements (ICOMOS CIIC, 2008). The Committee’s intent takes hold further with advancing records on organizing targeted information about specificities of the facets of the route. Hence guiding records dedicated to components such as civil architecture buildings, archaeological sites, and cultural landscape appeared—to inevitably echo the intricacy of CR information and documentation undertaking.

3.2 In Relation to Underwater Heritage Information and Documentation

Similar to cultural routes, the information acquisition and management regarding Underwater Heritage can be understood in terms of either identification or protection. The first is associated with establishing the underwater heritage “site”

identity and making the case for its cultural value; the second is associated with actions of all sorts that contribute to the all-encompassing sphere of protection.

The international support for the UW heritage information domain set the stage for challenging information collection and management prospects. On the global level, the support pronounced in the ICOMOS 1996 Charter on the Protection and Management of Underwater Cultural Heritage is an impetus in this direction. Cognizant of the aquatic physical contexts of the buried or protruding assets, and dwelling on the well established investigative aspects of marine archaeology, the Charter demanded, as an inseparable part of project design, adequate documentation, report preparation, post-fieldwork analysis of artefacts and documentation. The Charter Article 8 emphasizes “All investigation must be thoroughly documented in accordance with current professional standards of archaeological documentation. Documentation must provide a comprehensive record of the site, which includes the provenance of underwater cultural heritage moved or removed in the course of investigation, field notes, plans and drawings, photographs and records in other media” (ICOMOS, Charter on the Protection and Management of Underwater Cultural Heritage, 1996).

While the information documentation and management provisions of ICOMOS 1996 Charter on the Protection and Management of Underwater Cultural Heritage are patent in their doctrinal effect, other regional initiatives emerged to resound challenges facing the documentation function on a more tangible level. This case occurred in the geographically defined sphere of Europe under the Managing Cultural Heritage Underwater Program (MACHU). Started in 2000, “The primary goal of the MACHU project is to make information about our common underwater cultural heritage accessible for academic purposes, policy makers and for the general public (EUROPEAN UNION, Managing Cultural Heritage Underwater Program, 2001). A collaborative project among a number of European countries rich of maritime history, the program puts an emphasis on access of information by the use of high-end digital strategies including GIS and modelling. The survey work concentrates on test areas at selected sites in the MACHU coalition countries with continued exchange and alignment of direction between partners.

4. CONCLUSIONS

The conclusions presented below entertain the objectives of this paper in the realms of cultural appreciation, resource signification, and implications on documentation.

- The changing international position on the values of the natural and built environment continues to recognize new cultural resource categories as worthy of protection and conservation.
- The holistic concept of cultural heritage appreciation at the local, national, regional, and international levels has been attended to by conservationists and international association experts through one form of signification (for recognition) process or another.
- Categories like Cultural Routes and Underwater Heritage epitomize the international impetus of cultural appreciation and the need to set criteria and protocols for resource assessment in the signification process.

- The need to identify the newly appreciated cultural resources, to signify them, and to conserve them placed commensurate demands on the conservation field's function of information collection and documentation. The implications on research, survey, recoding, and dissemination in relation to these needs are vast.
- These needs have been addressed to a great degree through the international conservation community mostly at a global doctrinal level. This seems to have had effect on intra-country or continental regions where such entities took initiatives for information collection and documentation.

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