

THE CAPE TOWN DOCUMENT ON MODERN HERITAGE (2022)

PREAMBLE

The *Cape Town Document on Modern Heritage* advocates an equitable and sustainable approach to the theory and practice of modern heritage in a planetary age, calling for a reframing of how modern heritage is defined, identified, conceived, valorised, protected and safeguarded. The Document responds to the paradox that modern heritage is simultaneously of modernity and yet threatened by its consequences. By acknowledging the role of inequitable and unsustainable practices that gave rise to and often characterised modernity – slavery, imperialism, colonialism, and fossil fuel dependence – the *Cape Town Document on Modern Heritage* is a decentring and restitutive framework aimed at sustaining modern heritage for future generations in a more cohesive, inclusive and equitable way.

1. We, the participants from the two MoHoA Conferences (*Modern Heritage of Africa / Modern Heritage in the Anthropocene*) assembled at the University of Cape Town (UCT) from 22-24 September 2021 and the Bartlett School of Architecture, University College London (UCL) and the University of Liverpool (UoL), from 26-29 October 2022, wish to acknowledge the initiative of UCT, UCL and UoL under the auspices of MoHoA in providing timely forums in which to address the challenges in defining the heritage of our time. We also wish to affirm the knowledge that recognises the vital role of Africa as an exemplar of the global majority experience in contributing ways and means of broadening our perspectives to bring greater respect for and a wider understanding of modern heritage in a planetary age.

2. We also acknowledge the value of the framework for discussion provided by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and its World Heritage Centre (WHC), the African World Heritage Fund (AWHF), the professional contributions of the International Centre for the Study of the Preservation and Restoration of Cultural Property (ICCROM), the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), the International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS), the Documentation and Conservation of Buildings, Sites and Neighbourhoods of the Modern Movement (DOCOMOMO), the International Federation of Landscape Architects (IFLA), the International Council of Museums (ICOM), other international professional organisations, and their commitment to contemplate the broadening of understandings of modern heritage so that it equitably reflects the experiences of all societies and their encounters with modernity as exhibited by social and cultural practices, the creation of heritage through the interconnections between culture and nature, historic urban landscapes, and tangible and intangible attributes and assets.

3. This Document is conceived in the spirit of the *Nara Document on Authenticity* and the subsequent *NARA + 20* text, expanding the definition of what constitutes ‘the modern’ in a planetary age.

4. In developing the *Cape Town Document on Modern Heritage*, we celebrate the 20th anniversary of the UNESCO *Modern Heritage Programme* and build upon debates and definitions of modern heritage related to the implementation of the 1972 World Heritage Convention and its *Operational Guidelines*.

5. This Document aligns with and supplements existing conventions and recommendations, including UNESCO’s *Convention on the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage* (2003), the *Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions* (2005), the *Recommendation on the Historic Urban Landscape* (2011), the UN *Sustainable Development Goals* (2015), the *Ngorongoro Declaration* (2016), the *Culture: Urban Future* (2016), the UN Habitat’s *New Urban Agenda* (2016), the *Madrid / New Delhi Document* (2017), and ICOMOS’s *Culture in the Implementation of the 2030 Agenda* (2019), and elaborates on how they may contribute to safeguarding heritage to make our environments and resources equitable, safe, inclusive, resilient and sustainable.

6. This Document draws inspiration from the Africa Union’s *Agenda 2063; the Africa We Want*, which emphasises an inclusive people-driven approach to cultural identities, common values, and ethics. Irrespective of territory, this is only possible if communities and their constituents, in particular youth, women, indigenous, and other marginalised voices, are integral in defining and managing their modern heritage.

7. This Document asserts the link between the inequitable and unsustainable practices that gave rise to often characterise modernity and their planetary consequences in the Anthropocene. This link poses an existential threat not merely to modern heritage and its associated disciplines, but to life on earth. The *Cape Town Document on Modern Heritage* therefore demands innovative, creative and radical approaches to heritage practice aimed at achieving equitable and sustainable futures.

ARTICLES

1. Understanding Modernities

- 1.1 The terms modern, modernity, modernisation and modernism (and their myriad translations in multiple languages) are complex and interrelated, and therefore represent no single history and derive from no single origin, culturally, geographically, or conceptually. They are part of a constellation of multiple historical experiences born out of interconnected and intertwined local, regional, and global networks that have grown to have a planetary impact.
- 1.2 Modern heritage embodies the continuous and accelerating disruption and reconstitution of identities.
- 1.3 This process of reconstitution invokes a sense of belonging as part of a perpetually self-refashioning experience that has generated new identities and meanings born out of hybridity, globality, and transculturality.
- 1.4 Modern heritage derives value and meaning not from the mutual exclusivity of dichotomies, oppositions, and contradictions, as in old and new, East and West, North and South, or tangible and intangible, but from their mutual interdependence.
- 1.5 Modern heritage bears testimony to the historicity of its place, as well as to transformations that embody regional and planetary interconnections that generate a spirit of place.

2. Ruptures and Continuities

- 2.1 Ruptures and continuities are complementary attributes of modernity whose cultural expressions are embodied in modern heritage.
- 2.2 Modern heritage embodies a disruption of temporal constructs and narratives, especially, but not exclusively, towards linear conceptualisations and chronologies.
- 2.3 Modern heritage embodies the interaction of similarity and incommensurability of different linguistic systems, often bearing testimony to their ruptures and transformations caused by external factors and political forces. These ruptures have subsequently informed the definition and valorisation of this heritage in particular contexts.
- 2.4 Modern heritage acknowledges its role in modernisation and industrialisation, and the ruptures it brought to diverse landscapes often possessing continuities that exist because of an uneven industrial presence.

3. Expanding Definitions

- 3.1 There is need for a transcultural understanding of modern heritage that challenges existing definitions of heritage and taxonomies based on their assumptions of universality to acknowledge local cultural practices, materials, and methodologies used to create modern heritage.
- 3.2 The definition of modern heritage needs to expand beyond geographically and disciplinarily specific interpretations of *modernism* by acknowledging and including geo-cultural practices that are ephemeral and intangible, including but not limited to oral testimonies, spoken word, texts, artworks, performative practices, and non-material or digital media.
- 3.3 Modern heritage recognises the interactions and interconnections between nature and culture.
- 3.4 Modern heritage embodies and promotes the wide range of lived experiences of all those connected with this heritage, especially voices, stories, and knowledge of those marginalised by modernity.

4. Diversity and Complexity

- 4.1 As a cultural manifestation of a planetary condition, modern heritage embodies and embraces complexity, manifested in diversity, hybridity, plurality, and heterogeneity, which must be reflected in its interpretations.
- 4.2 Modern heritage is multi-layered and is part of the cumulative and accelerated stratification of multiple memories and narratives across time and space.
- 4.3 Modern heritage recognises the diversity of local knowledges and continuing practices that have engaged with modernity and have contributed to the development of modern built forms, landscapes, and cultural practices.

5. Justice and Equity

- 5.1 Components of modern heritage, including its theory and practice, have origins in unjust and inequitable practices, and these need to be recognised and redressed in the identification, protection, restitution, valorisation, safeguarding and management of modern heritage assets.
- 5.2 The encouragement of innovation and the application of equitable access to resources are a prerequisite for modern heritage practices globally to ensure its durability, resilience, and sustainability.
- 5.3 Modern heritage practices recognise the connection between environmental and cultural continuity and human rights.
- 5.4 The World Heritage Convention must be implemented in a just and equitable way in response to the threats to modern heritage posed by natural and human factors.

6. Cooperation, Dissemination, and Capacity Building

- 6.1 The recognition and protection of modern heritage depends on an inclusive, cross-sectorial and trans-disciplinary approach to develop cooperative managerial frameworks.
- 6.2 Modern heritage addresses communities, indigenous people and rights holders and its relevance should be part of local comprehensive awareness, education, and interpretative activities especially in connecting younger generations with initiatives that will make heritage a source of economic and social opportunity for their benefit.

7. Recommendations

Recognising the anthropocentric transformations that are threatening the state of conservation of modern heritage, we urge that actions be taken to ensure its protection and transmission to future generations. We call on all the entities below to recognise the aforementioned as being central to the theory and practice of modern heritage from a global majority perspective and in cognisance of the planetary issues of the 21st century. The premise of these Recommendations is to advocate systemic change in support of under-represented or marginalised groups, voices, and perspectives.

7.1 Conceptual

Noting the multiple genealogies of modern heritages of the global majority, it is necessary to:

- a) relinquish the oppositional distinction between traditional and modern;
- b) adopt a new conceptual framing that extricates global majority experiences from the singular mimetic of pre-defined modern standards set by a global minority.

7.2 Methodological

Noting the complexity of historically shared modern heritage, a new set of methodologies is required that:

- a) places modern human emancipatory potential as its central methodological principle within a framework of human rights;
- b) gives recognition to the complexity of contemporary heritage away from singular forms of controlled, imposed and/or uncontested heritage;
- c) allows for the recognition of suppressed, marginalised, erased histories and heritages, especially related to slavery, indenture and other forms of modern bondage labour, indigenous peoples, refugees and exiles, youth, and genders;
- d) allows for equitable consultation, equal participation, and negotiations in good faith between professional experts and indigenous peoples, representatives and delegates of local and state levels, and / or regional level groups who have declared and verifiable interests to be included in any heritage assessments and their outcomes;
- e) develops a heritage vision and practice that investigates and makes visible the links of the local to the global and amplifies the specificities of the multiple levels as an aspect of global cultural heritage values and exchanges (within a universal human rights framework of equity);
- f) acknowledges that the specificities of local heritage may not be a linear interpellation at other levels of heritage investigation and interpretation;
- g) embraces inclusivity and recognises this depends on multiple interpretations of tangible and intangible heritage.

7.3 Professional

We recommend the following immediate actions by stakeholders in the World Heritage system:

7.3.1 UNESCO's World Heritage Committee and the General Assembly of the State Parties and their Secretariat (World Heritage Centre)

- a) Acknowledge the existential threat posed by human-induced ecological collapse and amend and update the World Heritage Committee's *Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention* to support stakeholders effectively address this threat.
- b) Acknowledge the historical inequity in the implementation of the *World Heritage Convention* and prioritise the equitable recalibration of the World Heritage List.
- c) Recognise the *Cape Town Document on Modern Heritage* as a guide for the protection and enhancement of modern heritage and integrate these recommendations in decision-making processes.

7.3.2 Advisory Bodies to the World Heritage Committee

- a) Conduct a full range of thematic studies and to update the ICOMOS 2004 Gap Analysis to better represent modern heritage in geo-cultural groupings and prepare a thematic study on modern heritage.
- b) Revise the Tentative Lists, especially from State Parties currently under-represented on the World Heritage List.
- c) Acknowledge the historical inequity in the implementation of the *World Heritage Convention* and prioritise the equitable recalibration of the conceptualisation of and approach to heritage and its safeguarding.
- d) Widen the understanding of heritage professionals and the conceptualisation of expertise to include knowledge of modern tangible and intangible heritage in the processes of the World

Heritage Convention's implementation.

7.3.3 State Parties

- a) Take immediate actions in identifying their modern heritage, give it a 'function in the life of the community and to integrate the protection of that heritage into comprehensive planning programmes' increase 'public awareness, involvement and support through communication' (Article 5 (a), *World Heritage Convention*) also ensuring that voices less heard have equal opportunity to recognise these heritage values, by identifying and defining their modern heritage.

7.3.4 Heritage Professionals and Professional Bodies

- a) Widen the understanding of heritage professionals and the conceptualisation of expertise to include local and oral historians, ethnographers, localised skills, and technologies that contribute to knowledge of modern tangible and intangible heritage.
- b) Develop a set of research methods to test the veracity of knowledge gained from widening the scope of knowledge about modern heritage proposed by this document.
- c) Develop studies and conduct research to identify modern heritage in their communities and to counteract the dangers that threaten its protection and disseminate this knowledge.

7.3.5 Academia

- a) Prioritise research from global majority territories and on global majority experiences and subjects.
- b) Strengthen effective links globally to engage in critical and pioneering research in all aspects of heritage, from its philosophical foundations to the development of new technical methods and methodological approaches, to reveal modern heritage in all its forms and to urgently address the challenges of the Anthropocene.
- c) Engage in World Heritage at national, regional, and international levels.

The Cape Town Document on Modern Heritage was drafted by the Modern Heritage of Africa initiative, approved at the Cape Town Conference on Heritage Day, 24 September 2021 and revised after the Modern Heritage in the Anthropocene conference at an expert meeting in Liverpool University on 29 October 2022.

APPENDIX

Definitions

Conservation: All efforts designed to understand cultural heritage, know its history and meaning, ensure its material safeguard and, as required, its presentation, restoration and enhancement (Appendix 2: *Operational Guidelines*).

Equity: The state, quality or ideal of being just, impartial, and fair.

Geo-cultural practices: Practices associated with geographical locations each possessing their own distinct cultural characteristics as in paragraph 71 of the Operational Guidelines.

Identity: Identification with, or sense of belonging to, a particular group based on various cultural categories, including nationality, ethnicity, race, gender, and religion. Cultural identity is constructed and maintained through the process of sharing collective knowledge such as traditions, heritage, language, aesthetics, norms and customs.

(<https://centerforinterculturaldialogue.files.wordpress.com/2014/07/key-concept-cultural-identity.pdf>)

Modern Heritage: Inherited cultural and natural attributes of the modern era, the temporal extent of which is disciplinarily varied and ranges from the past two centuries to the past two millennia.

(*Article 1 of the World Heritage Convention defines cultural heritage as monuments, groups of buildings and sites of cultural value*).

Sustainability: “meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.” (UN Brundtland Commission, 1987)

Key Events/Documents

- 2001 *Modern Heritage Programme*, UNESCO
- 2004 Regional Meeting on Modern Heritage for Sub-Saharan Africa (Eritrea), UNESCO
- 2006 *Modernism at Risk*, World Monuments Fund
- 2014 *Keeping it Modern*, The Getty Foundation
- 2017 *Madrid / New Delhi Document*, ICOMOS ISC20C International Scientific Committee on Twentieth Century Heritage
- 2021 *Twentieth Century Historic Thematic Framework*, Getty Conservation Institute