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# **“THEY DO THINGS DIFFERENTLY THERE...”: HISTORIC HERITAGE VALUE AND ITS ASSESSMENT BEYOND NEW ZEALAND**

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This paper reflects on international approaches to the ways value is ascribed to historic heritage and the process of significance assessment. It summarises the international evidence and identifies those areas where New Zealand frameworks diverge from international policy and practice, notably in Australia, Canada, England and the United States. This paper is not intended to be a comprehensive study of New Zealand strategies but is presented as a starting point for discussion. Table 1 outlines New Zealand approaches in terms of the positive and negative components discussed.

## **1 Heritage value – its nature and quality**

The international evidence indicates that heritage is defined holistically and policy is referenced to, and inclusive of, all heritage values. For example, the term ‘historic environment’ is used in England while in Australia the generic term ‘cultural heritage’ signifies both natural and cultural elements. However, there are significant misunderstandings about New Zealand heritage, its definition and value. Concepts of social significance and intangible values are poorly addressed and the diachronic, multivalent nature of the resource is not commonly acknowledged.

A charter establishing a clearly-articulated framework of heritage policy supported by practical government policy is a crucial component of effective decision-making. For example, the principles of the Burra Charter guide and govern Australia’s heritage policy, and provide a clear statement of the nature and meaning of heritage value. A charter or similar principles thus acts as a national standard for evaluation and assessment by promoting consistency, best practice and a coordinated approach.

Table 1. Positive and negative features of New Zealand assessment approaches

| Topic                                  | Positive features   | Negative features  |
|--|---|--|
| 1 Heritage value                       | Recognition of indigenous values in ICOMOS NZ Charter.  | Nature and qualities poorly defined; reference to social values & holistic qualities required; ICOMOS NZ Charter less effective in practice.   |
| 2 National and sub-national frameworks | Recent funding initiatives. Register: upgrade; improved policy and information requirements; increase in historic area registrations; pilot projects. Good work by some regional and city councils. | No national strategy; inadequate resourcing; need for a more effective lead agency. Legislation: lacks statutory integration; no separation between identification, assessment and protection; no statutory protection for significant heritage. Register: strategy & process unclear; unrepresentative, biased selection; no national evaluation; need for guidelines, regular review of registrations and faster processing. Statements of significance inadequate. Local authorities: variable assessment strategies; lack of guidance. |
| 3 Community issues                     | Successful projects and liaison with tangata whenua.  | Maori legitimacy insufficiently acknowledged; assessment criteria and process culturally inappropriate; status of Maori Heritage Council unclear. Inadequate community participation in identification, nomination and assessment process.   |
| 4 Significance assessment              | Pilot projects; draft thematic framework; greater recognition of historic areas & heritage landscapes.  | 'Significance' poorly defined; inconsistent process and methodology; lack of common terminology or categorisation of heritage; little interpretative guidance.   |

The ICOMOS New Zealand Charter affirms heritage, and particularly indigenous heritage values, and provides guidelines to heritage agencies consistent with international practice. However, it is apparent that the Charter lacks the strength and authority of its Australian counterpart. Its potential to provide direction to the heritage sector is underutilised, confirming Walton

and O’Keeffe’s opinion that the Charter is “evidently little read or understood” (2004: 13).

## **2 Frameworks for assessment**

### *National policy*

A significant factor promoting the efficacy of international frameworks for historic heritage management is the existence of an integrated national strategy driving the evaluation and assessment process. Australia, Canada and England are developing and implementing detailed, integrated national strategies for historic heritage to ensure consistency and multi-agency coordination. A key element of these strategies is the development of heritage policy supported by appropriate interpretative guidance to determine the criteria and methodology to use when assessing heritage values at all levels of governance. Moreover, such strategies, supported by realistic resourcing, signify a political willingness to invest in the heritage process and its successful outcomes.

Significantly, the Parliamentary Commissioner of the Environment undertook a similar review in New Zealand over ten years ago (Parliamentary Commissioner for the Environment 1996) with considerably less success. A detailed national strategy as set out in a national policy statement or a set of environmental guidelines for historic heritage drawing on collaboration of all heritage agencies has been repeatedly suggested as a way forward (ICOMOS New Zealand 2000; New Zealand Historic Places Trust 2004); however, there has been little substantive progress.

### *Resourcing*

Results of cost-benefit analyses in England indicate significant public interest and conviction in the value of recorded heritage (Kennedy 1999; Ozdemiroglu and Mourato 2001; The National Trust 2001; Hunt 2002a, b). An English survey quantifies the value generated by the historic environment noting its huge significance as an economic asset and that its benefits can, and should, be measured and assessed in ways no different from other aspects of the economy (English Heritage 2003). New Zealand can undoubtedly learn from overseas studies presenting historic heritage as an appreciating (rather than unappreciated) economic asset.

### *Agencies and a lead agency*

Overseas practice affirms the importance of a single, national, well-resourced lead agency. This is effected in Australia by the Australian Heritage Commission, in Canada by Parks Canada, in England by English Heritage and in the United States by the National Parks Service. A national agency with a

clearly defined leadership role is essential for the realisation of a common evaluation and assessment strategy, to co-ordinate and implement national standards, to ensure consistency and co-ordination and for the overall care and protection of historic heritage.

Organisations such as the Australian Heritage Council and English Heritage play a crucial role in developing policy, ensuring the effectiveness of national strategies and co-ordinating the work of heritage agencies. Despite the success of recent initiatives – the pilot projects and upgrade of the Register – there remains a question mark over the role and responsibilities of the Trust and its performance to date. Its overall performance as a *de facto* lead agency is debatable.

### *Legislation*

In all countries examined the process of identification and assessment, including listing decisions, is clearly separate from decisions about the current or future management of a place and its protection. Primary, unambiguous legislation establishes, clarifies and consolidates historic heritage evaluation and assessment strategies and promotes national consistency. The international evidence affirms the importance of primary heritage legislation that is comprehensive, compatible and integrated throughout all levels of governance. It provides statutory protection for all identified significant heritage and separates the process of identification and assessment from management and protection decisions.

There is an urgent need to rationalise the current confusing mix of statutes and to integrate major heritage-related legislation in New Zealand. Of particular concern is the separation of responsibilities between the identification and assessment of historic heritage in the Historic Places Act 1993 (HPA) and its protection in the Resource Management Act 1991 (RMA). Integration of these processes is essential for effective governance, to accord greater recognition to Maori historic heritage and to give effect to local authority process. Furthermore, legislative protection for all identified significant heritage is essential.

### *Registration and listing*

The listing of heritage of international, national, regional and local significance is integral to good heritage management practice. Legislative change and improvements to the registration process have featured significantly in the heritage environments of Australia, Canada and England. In all the countries reviewed the assessment and listing of significant heritage in national, state and local registers is determined according to national criteria

consistently applied and co-ordinated by a lead agency yet allowing for local and community preference. Qualities of commonality of criteria and consistency of process are applied comprehensively from national registers through to state and local lists, with information provided by comprehensive, centralised databases.

Moreover, clear guidelines and procedures help interpret the criteria for registration to ensure their application is nationally consistent, with criteria weighted for heritage of local significance. The primary registration categories are based on carefully developed criteria for national and international significance. Where registration thresholds are applied, they are intelligible, clearly set and clarify the basis on which places are deemed significant. A statement of significance accompanies each registration and interpretative guidance on the registration criteria and their thresholds is available. Finally, the dynamic quality of any registration is recognised in provisions for regular review. Registration and listing are carried out by an independent, multidisciplinary expert body. Moreover, local authorities are encouraged to establish standard procedures for the listing of places of regional and local significance consistent with a nationally agreed strategy.

In terms of registration structure, a variety of formats exist – from Australia with four separate lists to England with one comprehensive register. The important determinant is the soundness of related evaluation and assessment strategies and clear, consistent, comprehensive national standards in all cases and at all levels. Australia's lists include places of both natural and cultural heritage value, while English strategies incorporate the broader context of the historic landscape. There is a clear movement away from the singularity of an iconic, place-based approach to a more holistic consideration of the place and its context within the historic environment.

Significant improvements to the registration process and the Register of the Historic Places Trust have occurred in New Zealand, notably the registration upgrade, designed to make the Register more representative and comprehensive; and the regional pilot projects. However, significant shortcomings exist. These relate principally to the inadequate expression of heritage values in the Register; confusion regarding the primary registration categories and minimum requirements; lack of co-ordination and deficient guidelines; its inconsistency, patchy coverage and unrepresentative nature; the lack of provision for the regular review of registrations and its statutory format. The core issue is whether the Register itself is at fault or its operational strategies. Certainly, the lack of a national assessment strategy has resulted in poor co-ordination, confusion and inconsistent application of assessment criteria by central and local agencies (Walton and O'Keefe 2004). Current registration

policies and procedures are a poor reflection of the richness and diversity of New Zealand's historic heritage both in terms of the selection of places of national importance and those places chosen as representative of the nation's heritage.

In terms of sub-national frameworks, the existence of a national strategy in the four countries reviewed provides state, regional and local authorities with a methodology for identifying and assessing historic heritage and for effectively integrating registered places into local planning provisions with an appropriate level of protection. These planning provisions are generally effective in their management of heritage with places protected in heritage overlays in most planning departments.

Some good practice by regional authorities and the better-resourced city councils is apparent in New Zealand. However, major variations and inconsistencies in local authority procedures exist which hamper their ability to promote historic heritage to the communities they serve.

### **3 The community**

The social value of a place or site in the eyes of the community is paramount. A holistic definition of historic heritage, inclusive of the social and cultural values of the entire heritage environment, is fundamentally demonstrated in international practice. Encouraging community engagement helps people understand historic heritage so that they can contribute to its selection and assessment. Public participation in the management of historic heritage can be assisted by establishing partnerships with communities of interest, local authorities, businesses and the wider community, and by developing new tools for assessment strategies using community-based methodologies.

However, the multivalent qualities of heritage are insufficiently recognised in existing New Zealand frameworks. Inadequate attention is paid to its dynamic qualities and to its spiritual and intangible values. Natural and cultural phenomena are viewed as separate entities in policy while community perceptions tend to view them as one. The narrow vision of a site and place-based approach evidenced in much of New Zealand practice ignores the contextual landscape of historic heritage and thus limits a full characterisation of the resource. New Zealand approaches give preference to the national importance of a place while examples of locally and regionally significant heritage, it is argued, are insufficiently acknowledged.

Overseas policies recognise and are responsive to indigenous values. They display sensitivity to cultural difference and emphasise the importance of engaging with as wide a cross-section of the community as possible. The equivalence of indigenous and non-indigenous heritage is affirmed, and the

principle that primary responsibility for identifying and assessing indigenous heritage values rests with indigenous communities.

However, in practice, diverse methods of management are evident. Australia's separatist treatment of the indigenous heritage of Aboriginal communities, with separate legislation and records of sites of significance, has distinguished it from mainstream heritage practice, although there are now moves towards a more inclusive approach. Canada includes places significant in Aboriginal history on its new Register, while the United States national register includes places of indigenous significance and is making efforts to better recognise traditional cultural properties.

The New Zealand approach to Maori historic heritage appears better developed than overseas, indigenous practice. The ICOMOS NZ Charter affirms Maori cultural and indigenous heritage values that are recognised in primary legislation and accorded varying degrees of protection while tangata whenua involvement in local level decision-making is noted.

However, Maori scepticism of the heritage assessment process is not misplaced; greater cultural awareness and acceptance of the holistic qualities of Maori philosophy would promote an inclusiveness that would benefit all communities of interest. It is suggested that current frameworks do not serve Maori and many aspects are culturally inappropriate. Those of particular note relate to the responsibility for the assessment of Maori sites of significance; issues of wahi tapu and the confidentiality of information; assessment methodology and the status and function of the Maori Heritage Council. Recognition of Treaty principles in the New Zealand ICOMOS Charter and the RMA establishes principles of a co-ordinated response to Maori and their historic heritage in accordance with a process of political inclusiveness. The challenge is thus to manage Maori desire for self-determination of Maori heritage in the context of a contemporary political climate which promotes a mainstream approach.

#### **4 Significance assessment**

A variety of approaches characterise the criteria for establishing significance and a range of evaluation and assessment techniques is evident in overseas practice. The overriding qualities for assessment criteria are those of detail, precision, flexibility, comparability, transparency, ease of understanding and application, flexibility and a facility enabling their consistent application across the entire heritage resource. Furthermore, the application of national standards in the selection and assessment process governing the listing of heritage from national to local level, preceded by a comprehensive identification process, is established beyond reasonable doubt.



Table 2 describes a range of common features based on the characteristics identified in overseas practice and indicates the qualities of an evaluation and assessment strategy that may be considered appropriate and effective. Additional features identified in overseas practice comprise a set of core assessment criteria clearly defined in a national strategy; the existence of regional and contextual studies utilising a thematic framework and the presentation of the entire framework in clear, comprehensive guidelines.

| Table 2. Features indicative of an effective evaluation and assessment strategy |  |
|---|--|
| Quality   | Detail   |
| Culturally appropriate  | Conscious of, and sensitive to, principles of indigenous ownership and the rights of ethnic minorities |
| Multicultural   | Acknowledges the diverse nature of historic heritage   |
| Objective   | Not subject to individual, <i>ad hoc</i> decision making   |
| Nationally applicable   | Consistent application to all heritage, at all levels, by all agencies                                 |
| Easy to use & apply   | Simple procedures ensure relative ease of application  |
| Systematic  | Logical procedures characterise assessment strategies  |
| Robust  | Based on a systematic process of enquiry that is both legally defensible and professionally sound      |
| Understandable  | Readily understood by all involved in the assessment process   |
| Economic  | Not unduly complex   |
| Inclusive   | Incorporates a high level of community engagement  |
| Integrated  | Agency co-ordination to ensure effective strategic planning  |
| Dynamic   | Flexible to accommodate shifts in societal value   |

The international evidence identifies a variety of approaches to the assessment of significant heritage. In Australia, for example, complementary and co-ordinated criteria apply at all levels – national, state and local. A common terminology describes the processes and decisions relating to evaluation, assessment and listing – the consensus appears to favour a case-by-case approach to assessment, rather than a numerical scoring system.

Agencies use comparative criteria for assessment alongside culturally appropriate heritage identification and assessment studies and for regional and contextual studies. Thematic frameworks provide a means of understanding and developing key themes that have helped shape a community and create its

identity. Indeed, a thematic approach has been adopted in Australia, Canada, the United States and, in a modified format, in England as a way of reducing the *ad hoc* nature of registrations, to promote a fairer representation of heritage types, encourage community participation and to identify the heritage of minority groups. Comprehensive guidelines direct assessment with interpretative guidance available to all agencies.

In contrast, a variety of assessment strategies are evident in New Zealand with no apparent consistency in their application or operation. Core criteria are minimally apparent; the assessment process by heritage agencies is uncoordinated and of variable quality. Regional and contextual studies designed to inform comparative assessments are at an elementary stage and a thematic framework is in development. There is also an absence of user-friendly guidelines to assist agencies in applying procedures.

### *Historic areas and landscapes*

The concept of historic landscapes has the potential to enable representative exemplars of natural, cultural and historic features to be recognised and preserved. The context of historic places, their interrelationship with other items and placement in the landscape is a well-established concept in the literature of historic heritage studies and in the heritage strategies of many countries. The international evidence affirms the importance of a nationally agreed and coordinated strategy to evaluate and assess historic areas and landscapes carried out in the context of clear, consistent frameworks for assessing their significance.

Initiatives in England demonstrate that an inclusive approach to landscape evaluation, applied in tandem with other conservation developments in countryside management, can be used successfully to promote a common national framework for conservation decisions (Fairclough 2003). The attractiveness of such an approach, whereby the entire landscape can be viewed as a human artefact, is compelling; the challenge, Walton and O'Keeffe (2004) argue, lies in translating this idea into policy for New Zealand.

Overseas practice demonstrate the importance of a coordinated, national strategy to manage the assessment of historic areas and landscapes, coincident with an integrated approach to the management of the resource. In New Zealand heritage strategies focussing on historic areas as an element of the heritage resource requiring its own evaluation and assessment process are embryonic. Similarly, the concept of heritage landscapes has only recently featured as a management issue requiring its own strategies (New Zealand Institute of Landscape Architects 2005).

### *Archaeological sites*

Overseas practice affirms that archaeological significance is defined and assessed according to clear, consistent criteria and thresholds. Due to the difficulty of carrying out a full assessment of archaeological evidence, some form of interim protection, safeguarding the evidence prior to excavation, is a standard approach. A programme of nationally co-ordinated comparative studies such as the English Monuments Protection Programme provides an evaluative basis. These studies are supported by a comprehensive information database and site inventory – in England, this takes the form of Historic Environment Records.

Clear definitions of archaeological value together with the application of consistent assessment criteria and thresholds characterise overseas policy and practice. In New Zealand, by contrast, the definition of archaeological value is unclear; the status and assessment of archaeological sites is confusing and particular tensions relate to the distinction between archaeological values and values to Maori. The status of archaeological sites in separate sections of the HPA is confusing; protection mechanisms are unclear and the fixed cut-off date for an archaeological site is an anachronism and culturally inappropriate. Finally, a site-based approach limits understanding of the cultural and geographic context of the evidence.

### **To sum up**

Table 3 contrasts New Zealand frameworks to the international evidence. Effective system characteristics in the first column denote the principal features contributing to effective frameworks for valuing and assessing historic heritage in Australia, Canada, England the United States. Column two identifies comparable characteristics in New Zealand frameworks drawn from the summary of positive and negative features in Table 1. The third column indicates the extent to which New Zealand meets, partially meets or falls short of the characteristics of effective international practice. It is apparent that some aspects of New Zealand frameworks are marginally effective: the principles of the New Zealand ICOMOS Charter; the protection mechanisms of RMA legislation; certain examples of community engagement; the existence of a draft thematic framework and, finally, the assessment of heritage landscapes which are at a developmental stage. However, New Zealand frameworks fall short when contrasted to the remaining fourteen characteristics.

It is apparent that an explicit declaration of the values and significance of a place, especially in relation to concepts of social value and the holistic qualities of historic heritage, is fundamental to effective heritage practice, al-

Table 3. New Zealand frameworks contrasted to effective system characteristics

| Effective system characteristics   | New Zealand   | How effective? |
|--|---|----------------|
| Heritage value – nature & qualities: Holistic definition inclusive of context & values; common terminology | Nature and qualities poorly defined; No inadequate references to social values & holistic qualities | No             |
| Charter or guiding principles  | New Zealand ICOMOS Charter effective in principle, less effective in practice                       | In part        |
| Effective national heritage strategy   | National heritage strategy not apparent   | No             |
| Adequate resources   | Inadequate resources  | No             |
| Single government department   | No single government department   | No             |
| Single national agency   | No single national agency; HP Trust roles unclear   | No             |
| Primary, integrated legislation  | RMA 1991 & HPA 1993 lack integration.   | No             |
| Primary legislation protects district plans  | Places protected under the RMA when listed in In part   | In part        |
| Comprehensive national register(s)   | Register of the Historic Places Trust No selective  | No             |
| Register categories: broad; protects place & values  | Register categories narrow; places & values not protected   | No             |
| Integrated framework from national to local levels   | Poor integration  | No             |
| Indigenous heritage: respected & valued; Indigenous peoples to determine value                             | Valued in principle; Maori determination deficient in practice                                      | No             |
| Effective community engagement   | Some community engagement   | In part        |
| Assessment process: clear & consistent; national standards; common terminology                             | Inconsistent process; no national standards or common terminology                                   | No             |
| Significance criteria: clear, precise, consistent, comprehensive   | Confusing definitions; inconsistent criteria & thresholds   | No             |
| Thematic framework: clear, consistent, comprehensive   | In draft  | In part        |
| Assessment guidelines: clear, comprehensive  | Limited interpretative guidance   | No             |
| Strategies for assessment of heritage landscape values   | In primary stages of development  | In part        |
| Effective strategies for archaeological sites  | Strategies for archaeological sites deficient   | No             |

though the extent to which a broadly accepted process for doing this currently exists remains questionable. Inconsistencies are identified in the management of the evaluation and assessment process at national and sub-national levels of governance and, particularly, the lack of any overarching national strategy or lead agency. The extent to which current process is expressive of, and responsive to, the needs of all communities in New Zealand is debatable and, finally, flaws in the strategy, criteria and process of significance assessment inhibit the effectiveness of heritage operations. It is suggested that developments overseas have the potential to inform the heritage sector in New Zealand but are underutilised at present.

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