

Retaining Intangible Heritage: Sustaining Identity in a Changing Place

Marilyn C Truscott

ICOMOS International Committee on Intangible Cultural Heritage

Australia ICOMOS

University of Canberra, Australia

Abstract

Indigenous communities, migrant groups and recent refugees in Australian cities have common issues related to their surrounds. How do they [re]connect with their intangible heritage within the surrounding often alienating, and rapidly changing urban environment? Does a continuity of intangible values foster community cultural identity and sense of place?

My past and current research indicates there are common participatory approaches of recollecting intangible heritage that assist in recovering and sustaining community identity. Such conscious efforts can foster community identity in a new or rapidly changing place. Indigenous groups are reconnecting with Country after dispossession and removal from Country at European settlement. Migrants from non-mainstream cultural groups are linking cultural practice with place within their new environment. Yet how are diverse voices heard in the pressures of urban development and an increasingly globalised world that assumes cultural uniformity? Despite Australia's Burra Charter and Code of Ethics on the co-existence of cultural diversity is there a notion by decision-makers that multi-cultural groups' heritage is sufficiently represented in restaurants or in folk or multi-cultural festivals? Is Indigenous heritage to be relegated to cultural tourism to rock art sites guided by community members, rather than a growing proud reconnection with identity?

This paper will present examples from Australia, demonstrating minority groups' resilient maintenance of their traditions and collective memory in the face of change. Processes and risks heritage are identified providing potential models for a sustainable and diverse heritage.