

Water and Heritage. Material, Conceptual and Spiritual Connections The Statement of Amsterdam (2013) and a Follow-up Publication

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Introduction

Water is life and water is death. It is an essential substance for survival of people, animals, plants and ecosystems. But, too much water or polluted water can threaten and kill people, societies and cultures. Water availability is erratic and dynamic because of the water cycle of precipitation, storage, run off, evaporation – and human use. Over 10,000 years ago, civilizations emerged because humankind developed capacities to manage water.

From the onset the relationship between humanity and water has been complex, entailing material, conceptual and spiritual dimensions. Many ancient water systems such as water cisterns for drinking water, qanats for irrigation and dams to protect societies against the perils of too much or too little water, some of which still exist today, bear witness to this complex relationship. They showcase the importance of these relations to sustain life, health, ecosystems and even peace in days long past, up to today, and even for future generations.

The World Heritage advisory body to UNESCO, the International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS), realizes the important role of cultural and natural heritage for water management and, vice versa, the importance of adequate water management to protect cultural and natural heritage against disasters. In 2013, ICOMOS Netherlands organised the conference “Protecting Deltas: Heritage Helps!” The conference, which brought over 100 experts from both the water and the heritage communities together, resulted in the Statement of Amsterdam. (See below) This statement provides a number of actions to be taken. As a direct follow up of the Amsterdam conference the book *Water and Heritage. Material, conceptual and spiritual connections* was published in April 2015. The book was presented during the World Water Forum 7 in the Republic of Korea to a Ministerial Round Table in Gyeongju on 13 April 2015 and in several thematic sessions from 13 to 17 April 2015 in Daegu. This article presents the main points of the Statement of Amsterdam, a summary of the book on water and heritage and the main points of the Ministerial Round Table and the thematic sessions during the World Water Forum 7 in Korea.

Statement of Amsterdam

The Statement of Amsterdam recognizes the dynamic nature of water management because of the constantly evolving relationship between water, land and societies. But the statement also points out that both tangible and intangible water management solutions of the past, including traditional knowledge, have great value as showcases for present and future water and land development planning, and can serve both as positive and negative examples.

The Amsterdam Statement recommended, *inter alia*, to:

- foster active research on the relations between water and heritage and the dissemination of water and heritage-related knowledge and experiences through education and communication, through publications, presentations, multiple communication channels and contemporary media;
- advocate the importance and value of heritage and historical experiences in water and heritage and sustainable development at international conferences of ICOMOS and water dialogues, including the World Water Fora.

Water and Heritage. Material, Conceptual and Spiritual Connections

Following up on the Amsterdam conference several actions were undertaken:

1. The production of an explanatory and awareness-raising film on water and heritage. This film can be seen on <http://www.icomos.nl/nl/water-heritage>.
2. The preparation of the publication *Water and Heritage. Material, conceptual and spiritual connections* (<http://www.sidestone.com/bookshop>).
3. The inception of a partnership with UNESCO’s International Hydrological Programme and the World Heritage Centre.

The film and the book are complementary. The film shows illustrative examples of the complex relations between water and heritage from historic times as far as 5000 BC to today, in times of climate change. The book *Water and Heritage. Material, conceptual and spiritual connections* is a compilation of articles. It opens with a plea to recognise the impor-

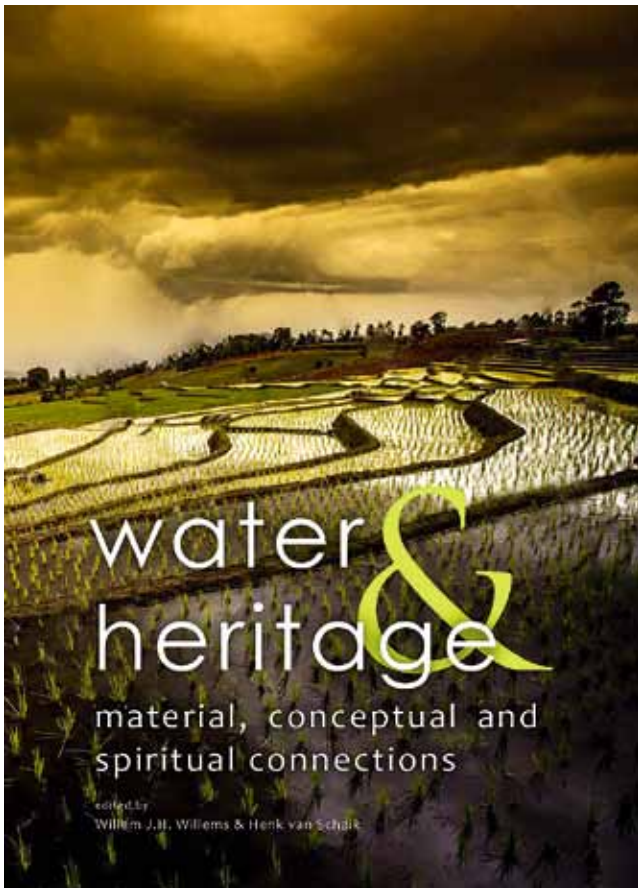


Fig. 1: *Water & Heritage*, front cover

tance of culture for sustainable development. The following article (cf. Rohit Jigyasu's paper in this volume) outlines the evolution of international conventions about cultural and natural heritage, both tangible and intangible, and advocates for stronger recognition of the values of cultural and natural heritage in development planning and activities. It also introduces the impacts of climate change through water (precipitation, floods and droughts) on heritage objects, and the values of indigenous and traditional management systems (conceptual heritage) and of spiritual perceptions.

The other 24 articles are grouped in three blocks:

The first block on "Material Connections" presents four articles on heritage in water infrastructure, showcasing the aesthetic uniqueness and beauty, technical genius, social appropriateness and the economic values of iconic ancient water infrastructure. The articles elucidate the cultural, economic and social values of these traditional water infrastructures for their contemporary use, as well as their provision of essential services today. In addition, the block includes 12 articles on "Disasters and Heritage: Impacts and Responses" from the Caribbean, the Pacific, New York, Recife, Black Pyramids in Sudan, Angkor Wat in Cambodia, Korea, Japan, a general article on water-related disasters, an article on a comparative study of flood mitigation projects at historic

sites in Germany (cf. Lieske and Will in this volume) and an article on underwater marine heritage.

The second block "Organisational Connections" presents three articles on Ifugao, Philippines; water services and organisational diversity; and the skills and knowledge of long-enduring organisations in improving the irrigation efficiency in Japan.

In the third block "Complexity of Spatial, Social, Cultural, Economic and Spiritual Connections" articles addressing these complex linkages are found on studies conducted about the Delta works in the Netherlands, the relevance of natural heritage for sustainable development, four millennia of water heritage and security in the Santa Cruz River in the U.S.-Mexican Border Region, the cultural and tourism strategies for preservation and enhancement of Venice and its lagoon, the influence of the Tennessee Valley on the archaeology in the South East of the United States, and the presentation of the initiative of the International Commission on Irrigation and Drainage and the World Water Council to set up a World Water Heritage Systems programme (WHS).

The conception of the book also prompted ICOMOS to approach UNESCO to enter into a partnership on water and heritage. The Director-General of UNESCO, Irina Bokova, lent the book her patronage and the publication's launch was planned for a jointly organized session at World Water Forum 7.

World Water Forum 7, 12–17 April 2015, Daegu and Gyeongju, Korea

The book and the film were presented in several sessions of the Forum Theme "Water Cultures, Justice and Equity" and during a Ministerial Round Table at the World Water Forum 7. Among the messages in these meetings was that cultural and natural heritage represent dynamically balanced interactions with the water cycle, and that modifications or manipulations of this balance should take into account the material, conceptual and spiritual costs and consequences of the manipulations through impact assessments. It was even argued that it was time to recognise the importance of culture, represented *inter alia* through heritage, as the fourth pillar of sustainable development in addition to economic and social development and environmental protection. It may be argued, however, that "culture" understood in its widest sense (cf. Mexico City Declaration on Cultural Policies, 1982) encompasses those pillars.

These messages were well received, and led to invitations to present this vision on cultural and natural heritage at the General Assembly of the International Council on Irrigation and Drainage. It initiated a World Water Systems Heritage Programme to highlight and promote the relevance of conceptual heritage for water development at the COP21 in Paris, December 2015.

Conclusions and Follow-up

Through the conference, the Statement of Amsterdam, the book and the participation in the World Water Forum the awareness about the importance of heritage for water and water for heritage has been substantially raised.

Expressions of the awareness include:

1. The development of the World Water Heritage Systems project by the International Commission on Irrigation and Drainage and the World Water Council;
2. The interest of UNESCO to organise a side event on water and heritage during the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, COP 21 in Paris, December 2015;
3. The interest of the World Water Council to have the topic on the agenda during the World Water Forum 8 that will take place in Rio de Janeiro in 2018.

References

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The Statement of Amsterdam

ICOMOS CONFERENCE * WATER & HERITAGE

PROTECTING DELTAS: HERITAGE HELPS !

Saving the urbanizing deltas of the world will be one of the most important critical challenges for the sustainable future of humankind. Increasing population density and exposure to water related hazards puts the rich cultural heritage in the world's deltas at high risk, especially due to climate change affecting flood and drought patterns, groundwater and sea levels, pollution and the frequency and intensity of disasters. Human ingenuity and the capacity to learn from heritage across cultures helped coping with water hazards in the past, it is key to improving health and well-being in the present, and will determine a sustainable and equitable future for all.

Societies and professional communities related to water, heritage and spatial planning alike are challenged to adapt to these realities. For a world struggling to find sustainable strategies to address these uncertainties, heritage helps by providing valuable examples of successful and not so successful decisions and actions, allowing us to better understand the dynamic relationship between society, water technologies and governance.

At the same time, water management offers essential technologies to protect world heritage sites threatened by natural disasters and environmental change in vulnerable regions on the banks of rivers, low lying deltas, river mouths, and coastal regions. UNESCO affirms the connection between heritage, water and sustainable development through its programmes, the conventions on World Heritage, Intangible Heritage and Underwater Heritage, in declarations on Responsibilities Towards Future Generations and on Culture for Sustainable Development, as well as in its Climate Change strategy.

The conference "Protecting delta's: heritage helps!" convened by ICOMOS Netherlands from 23-28 September 2013 in Amsterdam, brought together more than 100 water, heritage and planning experts from over 20 countries to share innovative strategies on heritage protection and water management, to build and promote linkages within and between communities, and identify opportunities for related heritage to contribute towards safe and sustainable communities in delta regions.

The conference finds that:

- Water, land, and societies are constantly evolving. Water-related heritage is, therefore, dynamic by nature; its management is 'management of change'. Many water-related heritage sites are still in use, they epitomize the need to adapt, to find new functions and interpretations for heritage based on principles of flexibility, robustness and resilience. Profound understanding of historical continuity and context is an essential source of information and inspiration for adaptive water management; successful water-heritage management requires understanding of the functions and questions of water management.
- Successful strategies to create attractive, sustainable and resilient cities for the future fully integrate heritage management, water management, urban and spatial planning. Heritage is a valuable asset, where it is a source of pride and appreciation for living communities. Safety measures to prepare societies for the effects of climate change will work best where they are combined with improving city landscapes, and respect heritage and the social context.
- The societal desire for sustainability has found its expression in spatial planning, but the relation between heritage development and sustainability is still in its infancy. Spatial planning plays a key role in connecting the insights offered by engineers, archaeologists, historians, ecologist and landscape architects; communicate the links between water, society and heritage to policy makers, professionals and the public; and actively involve stakeholders in participatory decision making processes.
- Awareness raising and capacity development are key to integrate water, heritage and planning: In some parts of the world, relatively recent advances in water technology created flood protections and safe water supplies too easily taken for granted. Heritage plays a crucial role in reminding societies that we have to keep redefining our relationship with water. Connecting existing knowledge and fostering broad integration into capacity development and education will support the institutional transformations needed.

Recognizing the on-going and accelerating threats of water to human societies, and the importance of heritage for water management, the conference calls upon governments, intergovernmental organizations, the corporate sector, and civic society to ensure adequate and concrete actions and recommends to:

- Promote linkages and mutual benefits of water for heritage and heritage for water between international and national NGOs, national and local governments, the civil society and relevant international and national organizations including UNESCO, ICOMOS, UNFCCC, UNISDR.
- Foster active exchange and dissemination of related knowledge and experience between governmental, non-governmental, private and research organizations including UNESCO, ICID, IWHA, C-40, ICOMOS, IWA, WBCSD, stimulate partnerships between these organizations, and develop and collaborative capacity development programmes on favourable concepts, solutions;
- Stimulate in the development and use of international, national, and regional strategies to protect and conserve natural and cultural heritage sites from floods, droughts and other water-related disasters. This includes risk mapping for water and heritage, sharing of relevant information, early warning systems, protective measures, risk spreading measures including insurances, adaptation measures and even evacuation plans.
- Acknowledge the importance and ensure the involvement of civil society and local governments as primary owners and caretakers of heritage in the development and preparation of related policies, strategies and plans.
- Share and exchange relevant information on the water risks for heritage through multiple-communication channels including new media. Developing combined digital maps including water and heritage information, in particular, will help raise the awareness of water experts, decision makers and the public about the historical roots of water management and similarly raise the awareness and appreciation of the risks that rising and falling water levels water pose for heritage.
- Advocate the importance and value of heritage for water development in international and regional fora (WWF7), networks (C-40) and organizations (UN, ICID, IWHA, IWA) for water, human development and urban development.
- Advocate the importance with water management and urban planning in ICOMOS, including its General Assembly 2014 in Florence to recognize the dynamic character of water related heritage, to value tangible and intangible benefits, to acknowledge heritage as objects and concepts. Support the integration of heritage-related issues into international standards and guidelines for water management and climate change adaptation.
- Explore options to charge a team of experts under the joint supervision of UN-WATER, ICOMOS and IUCN to elaborate the relations and mutual benefits of water for heritage and heritage for water as a decisive action towards universal recognition of heritage for water and vice versa.