

FUTURES FOR A COLLECTIVE PAST. THE SOUTH AFRICAN AFTER-LIFE OF THE EUROPEAN ARCHITECTURAL HERITAGE YEAR OF 1975

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ABSTRACT Close cultural ties have historically existed between the Netherlands and South African Afrikaners – decedents of mostly Dutch seventeenth century settlers – who share a built legacy. One would therefore expect seeing a marked local South African impact by the European Architectural Heritage Year of 1975 as Amsterdam hosted the event. However the first project application of the → *Declaration of Amsterdam* (see appendix) in South Africa only came after the year 2000. This essay explores the reception of the European Heritage Year of 1975 (EAHY 1975) in South Africa by presenting the aforementioned historic ties, the breakdown in relationships during the Apartheid years, and the reconciliation between these two nations after the South African transition to democracy in 1994. After the normalising of relationships the Netherlands re-entered the South African conservation arena, bringing their ‘Integrated Conservation’ expertise. This cooperation continues today through the Shared Heritage Programme of the Cultural Heritage Agency of the Netherlands through which a much-needed application of the principles of the → *Declaration of Amsterdam* is changing conservation perspectives in South Africa. This essay presents the intricate shared Dutch-South African history, explores the extent of knowledge of the 1975 European Architectural Heritage Year in South Africa at the time and presents recent and currently on-going shared projects that find their basis in the → *Declaration of Amsterdam*.

INTRODUCTION

Conservation practice reached its historic political zenith in South Africa in the 1970’s as a government sponsored endeavour, endorsed by an actively engaged civil society. Large conservation projects were being initiated at sites with a shared South African-European past. The most prominent project at the time, the restoration of the Dutch East India Company Castle of Good Hope in Cape Town, had commenced in 1969. In the same year, the historic town of Tulbagh with its main street of quintessential Cape-Dutch houses was all but destroyed by an earthquake, and the architect in charge of restoration at the Castle, Gabriel Fagan, supported by national government, began the restoration of this historic townscape with gusto. With such large-scale and important conservation efforts dealing with a heritage of Dutch – and therefore European origin – in process, one would expect a South African presence at the Amsterdam Congress on EAHY 1975. One might also expect that the EAHY 1975 and its aftermath brought about increase in valorisations of European architectural heritage as monuments in South Africa; that activities would have been planned to dovetail with European activities. The pre-existence of the historic ties with Europe further leads to the expectation that the resolutions of the 1975 European Heritage Year Congress, as contained in the → *Declaration of Amsterdam*, would have echoed at the southern tip of Africa, impacting on approaches to conservation and development in South Africa.

Yet, despite historic bonds between South Africa and both the Netherlands and Great Britain, it seems that only the slightest ripples of the distant event were felt in South Africa at the time. There are various possible reasons to be explored for this. This essay will attempt to present these and show that while the effect of the EAHY 1975 was all but negligible at the time, the net-effect of the → *Declaration of Amsterdam*

is however impacting conservation processes in South Africa today where the concept of shared heritage has created collaborations, building bridges over historic divides. In order to do so, we need to explore, in brief, the shared Dutch-South African past as well as the subsequent rift that formed between the two countries during the latter half of the twentieth century.

1. SHARED PAST, DIVERGENT VISIONS

This history is first punctuated in 1652 when the Dutch East India Company established the first permanent European settlement at the Cape of Good Hope. Despite the fact that direct political influence of Dutch domination on the sub-continent permanently ended in 1806, familiar ties remained, and wave after wave of Dutch emigrants continued to choose the southern shores of Africa searching for a brighter future. A large emigration event occurred at the end of the nineteenth century when a large contingent of Dutch administrators, educators, lawyers, architects, and engineers emigrated to the then independent South African Republic (ZAR). This reaffirming the cultural and familiar bonds between the Dutch and the Boers, an African grouping of predominantly Dutch descent (Abrahamse and Clarke 2014, 36–40).

Pro-Boer (Afrikaners, of predominantly Dutch descent) sentiment grew exponentially in the Netherlands during the run-up to the outbreak of the Second Anglo-Boer (or South African) War (1899–1902). The Netherlands South Africa Society (*Nederlands Zuid-Afrika Vereeniging, NZAV*) had already been established in 1881 to promote bilateral ties. Once war was proclaimed, Dutch volunteers joined the Transvaal and Orange Free State ‘burgers’ in their desperate fight to retain their sovereignty. The war was continually reported on in the Netherlands, and numerous fundraising activities held, for instance to assist the Dutch Red Cross in South Africa. With the fall of the ZAR imminent, the president of the ZAR, Paul Kruger, found exile in the Netherlands, but soon had to depart for neutral Switzerland when the Dutch Queen Wilhelmina was put under pressure from London. After the Second Anglo-Boer War, Dutch interest in the now British Transvaal and Free-State colonies slowly waned, but the NZAV continued its work, actively promoting emigration to South Africa through its monthly magazine *Zuid-Afrika*, which has been published uninterruptedly from Amsterdam since 1909 (initially brought into being by the closely allied ZASM Foundation).

The Second World War (1939–1945) brought a sharp divergence in social views between the Netherlands and South Africa despite the feelings of brotherhood that had emerged between the Dutch and the Afrikaners in South Africa at the end of the nineteenth century. In the Netherlands, the horrors of the war, their own wartime silent complicity in the Holocaust, coupled with a shame of the brutality of their own role as minority oppressor in the Indonesian National Revolution (1945–1947), heralded a new era of social awareness, an aversion to moral injustice and an abhorrence of nationalist agendas. Liberation in 1944 also brought a national admiration for, and pride in, the Dutch underground resistance. Associations between the Dutch Resistance and sixteenth century rebels who resisted Spanish domination in the Eighty Years War were already made during the Second World War. This all led to a liberal post-War Dutch attitude that recognized and emotionally associated with the right of a people to resist oppression.

The Second World War had quite the opposite effect in South Africa. The Union of South Africa had played its part on the side of the victorious Allies. Victory brought a newfound sense of national pride to this fledgling nation, strengthening the pre-war right-wing nationalist ideologies and bringing the conservative National Party to power as soon as 1949. The minority-ruled country, already segregated along racial lines, accelerated its trajectory towards the legislating of the Apartheid system, and the declaration of an independent Republic outside of the British Commonwealth. While these actions in South Africa should be seen in the light of the larger global post-World War II independence movement, they were carried out in a historically complex country with a 300-year history of settler domination. It was a country where a minority of citizens, of European descent, claimed dominion over a larger majority of

people of predominantly Black African, but also Indian and East-Asian descent. So while South Africans of European descent sought their independence from Europe in parallel to other African independence processes, the internal resistance to minority domination grew. Still, feelings of brotherhood among the Dutch towards their South African relatives continued to be fostered after the Second World War. The two governments had close ties. An intergovernmental Cultural Accord was signed between the two countries in 1951 (Jansen 1998, 51), which, amongst others, led to exchanges relating to architectural restoration (Koot 1975, 15). Civil society mirrored the official position. The *Paul Kruger Comité* in the city of Utrecht – founded in 1888 in honour of that erstwhile president of the nineteenth century South African Republic – serves as a typical example. In 1952 this committee installed a monument at a house in Utrecht where the exiled leader had lived. However these bonds were soon to be put to the test.

In South Africa, the Sharpeville Massacre of March 21, 1960 was followed less than a month later by a national ban on resistance movements. Soon after, in 1964, a life sentence was passed on Nelson Mandela. The memory of the role of the Dutch Resistance against Nazi oppression and the horror and shame of their role in oppressing the Indonesian insurrection, coupled with the post war humanist views that emerged in Western Europe, meant that blood was no longer thicker than water. Dutch popular opinion swung against their Afrikaner cousins; support grew for the South African Resistance and calls for a boycott of South Africa started to be heard (Fig. 1).

This aversion was not localized in the Netherlands. Across Western Europe and the globe concerns were raised. Following the 1976 killing of protesting school children by security forces in Soweto, Johannesburg, the Dutch government unilaterally froze the Cultural Accord of 1951 in 1977, and finally cancelled it in 1981 (Jansen 1998, 52) after the United Nations passed its resolution on *Cultural, Academic and other Boycotts of South Africa* in December 1980 (UN General Assembly Resolution A/RES/35/206E).



Fig. 1: Poster advertising public protest action against Apartheid held in Utrecht in 1975 (Internationaal Instituut voor Sociale Geschiedenis/ International Institute for Social History)

2. ARCHITECTURAL HERITAGE CONSERVATION AS A (MULTI)-NATIONAL ENDEAVOUR

The EAHY 1975 was a mainly European affair but included representation of some socialist countries, including the USSR (Glendinning 2013, 405). There were over one thousand delegates from twenty-five nations present at the Amsterdam Congress where experiences in integrated conservation were shared and a common approach “tailored to the specific circumstance of Europe” would be devised (Glendinning 2013, 405). The EAHY 1975 was built on the perspective of the commonality of the architectural heritage to all the peoples of Europe, which could be employed as a unifying endeavour. Architectural heritage was put to similar use in South Africa but based in a different ideological perspective.

The ideological use of built heritage in South Africa emerged during the period of political and cultural jostling between British and Boer interest preceding Second Anglo-Boer War. A post-War Boer-Brit unification drive exploited built heritage in much the same way as it was later used in post-War Europe: as evidence of a common past on which to base a common future. This use of the built environment was not only defined to the study and conservation of historic structures but also to new construction. A well-known example of this is Herbert Baker's claim that his design for two towers as part of the bilaterally symmetrical Union Buildings in Pretoria – composed of two office wings joined by a semi-circular colonnade around an open air theatre – was “symbolizing the two races of South Africa” (Baker 1944, 60). His “two races” here refers to Boer and Briton. This might be a fanciful post-rationalization (Fisher 2004, 45), but clearly illustrates the use of architecture in service of dogma. At the same time a growing appreciation of

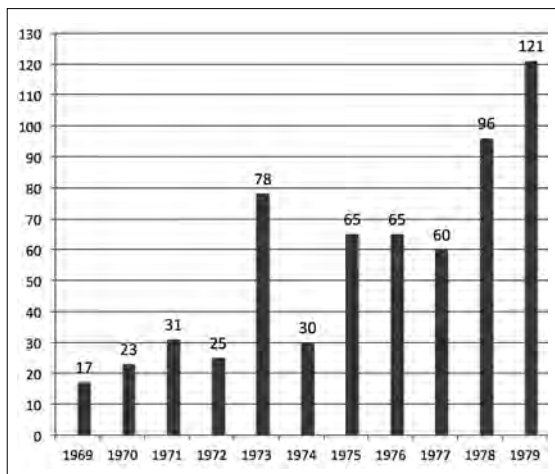


Fig. 2: Number of monuments valorised in South Africa by year, 1969–1979 (Clarke 2015)

listed generally did not carry living associations through memory or oral history). Three of these four sites were associated with direct Indian, and one with overt Coloured associations. Not a single site relating to the history of Black South Africans was listed in this period. The NMC clearly participated in the Nationalist agenda of the Apartheid government. The number of monuments listed annually also continuously increased. The year 1973 saw an anomaly in the number of listings, due to the listing of forty-three Cape Dutch buildings in a single notice in the *Government Gazette* of 28 September of that year (Gazette 4034, Notice 1740), all located in the aforementioned town of Tulbagh. Forty-one of them are located in the same street. Architect Gabriel Fagan reports (personal communication to author via email dated 27 February 2015) that this was an attempt to stop building owners from demolishing their severely earthquake-damaged houses before they could be restored. The National Monuments Act of 1969 only allowed for the protection of individual Monuments. No provision was made for townscapes or ensembles, and so serial declarations such as the Tulbagh declaration were used as a mechanism to establish heritage areas. This latter project illustrates that despite the increasing isolation of South Africa, the conservation movement there was undergoing the same evolution as in Western Europe, moving away from the conservation of individual objects towards an integrated approach.

The increase in the number of listings per year during the latter half of the 1970s has been ascribed to growing public interest in built heritage and economic and political factors (Frescura 1991). However, it can also be concluded that the annual number of listing of sites increased along with national and

Cape Dutch architecture led to a revival (initiated by Herbert Baker) of the style which in turn became the architecture of a national unit, the unofficial style of the Department of Public Works of the Union of South Africa.

The process of valorising of National Monuments clearly followed a similar agenda. South Africa has a long history of heritage legislation starting with the *Bushman Relics Protection Act* of 1911. Yet we need only look at a brief time frame. The National Monuments Council (NMC), as constituted under the 1969 *National Monuments Act*, was tasked with recommending places for listing as National Monuments. For the purposes of this essay, the first ten years of execution of the 1969 Act have been inventoried (Fig. 2).

Only four of the 611 sites declared during this decade relate to the heritage of South Africans of other than to those of European descent (archaeological sites excluded, as those

international resistance to the Apartheid policies; the more pressure imposed, the more concerted the efforts were to valorise the heritage of the ruling minority in an attempt at legitimising their claim over a geographical area on influence. International sanctions bolstered a die-hard nationalism, which ironically became a much stronger local conservation driver than the distant EAHY 1975.

3. SOUTH AFRICANS AND THE EAHY 1975

South Africa was suspended from participating in the United Nations in 1974, and so it is clear that an association with South Africa in terms of the EAHY 1975 would be controversial. Yet not all cultural ties had been severed. There was still contact, especially by way of civil conservation organizations, and mostly via the Netherlands and Britain.

There was also a South African presence at the Amsterdam Conference. Graham Binckes, representing the *Vernacular Association of South Africa* (VASA) attended through the offices of Europa Nostra (Binckes 1976, 15). This attendance was part of a three month long study tour of Europe to “study the various aspects of urban (and to some extents) rural conservation...” and arranged to coincide with the EAHY 1975 (Binckes 1976, 1). The tour was in turn the response to the visit of James Castle of the National Trust of the United Kingdom to Cape Town in May of 1975. Binckes’ unpublished whirlwind report on the study tour, prepared for the VASA, covers wide-ranging topics from descriptions of heritage organisations such as ICOMOS, through the educational role of museums and directly onto traffic calming solutions for historic urban areas. The EAHY 1975 and the Amsterdam Conference are briefly mentioned, as is the → *Declaration of Amsterdam*. The contents of the Declaration are, however, not reproduced. Binckes does succinctly present the pervasive conservation perspective of the time as that: “the final objects of conservation as a policy are frequently not understood or even considered, the ‘restoration’ of an old building being frequently regarded as an end in itself” (Binckes 1976, 2).

Of course news of the conference reached South Africa through the press. Various organisations maintained ties with controversy-resistant correspondents in Europe. One such *Heimatschutz* type organisation, the *Simon van der Stel Foundation* published an annual journal named *Restorica*, the only national architectural conservation magazine in South Africa at the time. In the 1970s the organization had a large local and international membership and counted three international Honorary Correspondents, Ton Koot in Amsterdam, Piet Korthuis in The Hague and John Wakefield at the Carnegie-Mellon University, Pittsburgh, USA. Koot, a foremost conservationist in the Netherlands, was an especially active contributor to *Restorica*. *Restorica* reported on the EAHY 1975; in the 1975 edition this was limited to two articles under the “Overseas” section, one article by Koot sketching the EAHY 1975 from the Dutch Perspective, and another brief report presenting the Congress programme and its celebrity speakers (Koot 1975, 87–88) (Fig. 3).

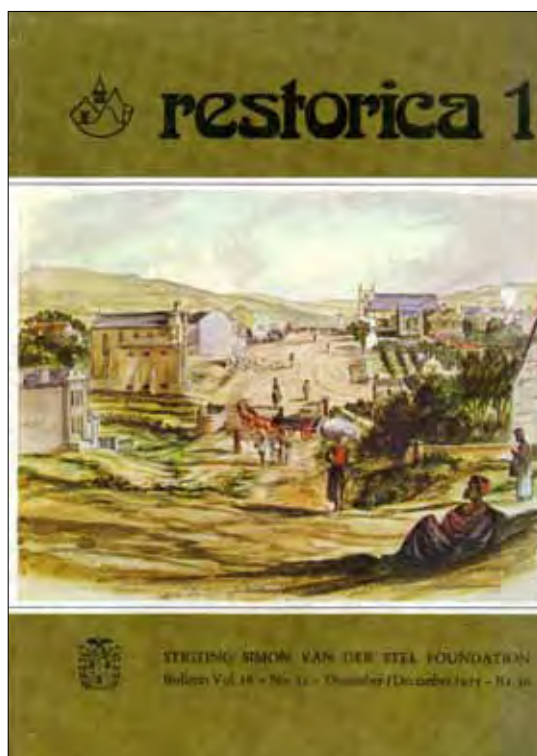


Fig. 3: Cover of *Restorica*, No. 1 (December 1975)

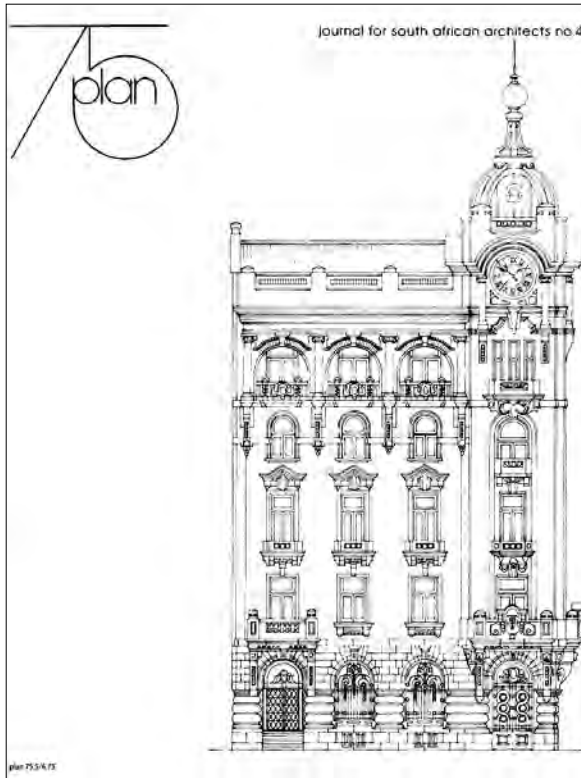


Fig. 4: Cover of *Plan, Journal for South African Architects*, 1975, no. 4

In the following edition in 1976, the opening speech of the Amsterdam Congress by Prince Claus of the Netherlands as well as a July 3, 1974 article from the Dutch daily *NRC Handelsblad* entitled *Fontein opent jaar van de Monumenten* (Monuments year opened with fountain) were republished, once again in the “Overseas” section (Rijksvoorlichtingsdienst 1976, 91). Architects too took note and a 1975 special heritage issue of *Plan* (Fig. 4), then the official journal of the Institute of South African Architects, mentions that the 1975 RIBA annual conference was dedicated to “The Continuing Heritage” as part of the EAHY 1975 (Institute of South African Architects 1975, 15).

Influence in South Africa was not only limited to mention in the press. European post-war changes in perspectives on heritage, in part a reaction to Modernist architecture (Glendinning 2013, 405) and the growing appreciation of historic city centres was mirrored in the South African conservation movement in the 1970’s. The *Grahamstown Historic Society* organized a 1974 *Conference on the Urban Heritage of South Africa* (s.n. 1975) where a resolution was passed to undertake a pilot project in conjunction with the EAHY 1975.¹ Other resolutions

pre-empt the conclusions of the Amsterdam Conference. Resolution 1 called on the *Institute of South African Architects* to establish urban and regional committees to assess architectural heritage structures and resolution 4 called on the Minister of Education to institute steps towards the creation of a national list of historic buildings that were not necessarily protected as National Monuments (Lipman 1983, 14). These mirror the provision of the → *Declaration of Amsterdam*, which posits that in order “[t]o make the necessary integration possible, an inventory of buildings, architectural complexes and sites demarcating protected zones around them is required.”

The protection of heritage ensembles was a hot topic in South Africa. The 1969 earthquake at Tulbagh had highlighted the value and vulnerability of historic village ensembles, sparking documentation and conservation activities in other towns, such as the aforementioned Grahamstown study. When, in the early 1970s, the Transvaal Provincial Administration proposed a redevelopment of the western façade of Pretoria’s historic Church Square in an attempt to showcase its own progressiveness, it evoked a near ten-year battle with conservation minded citizens who combated the proposal through public protests (Fig. 5), lectures, and the press. Conservationists won the day when it was positioned as an important political issue at election time.

At the same time similar protest actions in Johannesburg opposed plans to construct a large hospital in a historic neighbourhood Parktown. Here, in a predominantly English language environment, the plans could not be fought on a political platform which would endanger the position of the mainly Afrikaner backed National Party, and the battle was lost.

Fig. 5: Architecture students protesting the planned redevelopment of the Church Square West Façade. Here, Karel Bakker, later an internationally well-known architect and conservationist, with fellow student Recht Hiemstra, on the Square in 1975 (Pretoriana 72 (1975): 164)



The Church Square debacle was well documented, with reprints of newspaper articles included in editions of *Restorica* and *Pretoriana*, the journal of the local *Old Pretoria Association*, then the strongest conservation body in the administrative capital (Pretoriana 1975). It is curious that the EAHY 1975 is not taken up in a single published argument in support of the preservation of the western façade of Church Square. The EAHY 1975 is not mentioned once in *Pretoriana*, the 1975 edition of which was almost entirely dedicated to the battle for Church Square (Rex 1975). It seems that while there was an obvious resonance between South African and European conservation approaches at the time, a conservative South African suspicion of ‘decadent’ liberal Europe – coupled with great disappointment in the critical position their Dutch cousins took to Apartheid – may have prohibited the use of the → *Declaration of Amsterdam* as argument in the conservation debate.

In conclusion, circumstances, which include political and geographical removal, assured that little to no effect was felt in South Africa of the EAHY at the time. Then again, this can be expected, as the EAHY 1975 was, after all, a mostly European affair despite its limited links to Europe’s immediate neighbours.

4. A NEW DAWN

South Africa’s isolation remained intact throughout the 1980s during which international contact with local conservation movements was limited. The country re-emerged onto the international arena after the ban on resistance movements was lifted, and Nelson Mandela was released from prison in 1990. It took six more years before a South African ICOMOS Chapter would be formed; the statutes for the *South African National Committee* were finally presented at the 1996 ICOMOS General Assembly (ICOMOS 1997, 8). Overt contact between South Africa and the Netherlands was re-established much faster and one of the first architectural researchers to visit South Africa after the unbanning of anti-Apartheid resistance movements was Coen Temminck Groll. He subsequently became instrumental in reengaging Dutch interest in their built residue in South Africa. In 1996 a new *Netherlands-South Africa Cultural Accord* was signed, restoring the relationship that had existed under the 1951 Accord, but with a new focus on the associations built through the Dutch support of the resistance movements in exile. Concurrently a *Framework on the Common Cultural Heritage of South African and the Netherlands* (Kingdom of the Netherlands 2009) was implemented, supported by the Dutch *Homogene Groep voor Internationale Samenwerking* (HGIS) Fund that operated during 1997–2007. This was succeeded by the Shared Cultural Heritage programme, a partnership of the Netherlands’ Ministry of Education, Culture and Science and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs with a limited number of partner countries, among which South Africa. This programme supports conser-



Fig. 6: Street scene, Genadendal, 2014. The first executed project based on the principles of *integrated conservation* and the *Declaration of Amsterdam* upgraded the extant historic fabric to ensure longevity (Clarke 2014)

vation efforts by providing expertise on request, and has, as one of its focus areas, the strategic use of shared built heritage in urban regeneration. One of its programme lines, the revitalisation of *Historical Inner Cities* (Corten 2014, 5), is based on the years of experience with integrated conservation in the Netherlands, which partly informed the content of the Declaration of Amsterdam (Clarke and Corten 2011, 881).

The very first application of the → *Declaration of Amsterdam* in practice in South Africa came through a shared Dutch-South African project under the afore-mentioned *Framework*, the Genadendal Integrated Conservation project. The Genadendal Project was first mooted in the 1997 *Framework* document and executed during 2001–2008. The little known Moravian mission station (Fig. 6) had gained international attention after Nelson Mandela renamed the State President’s official residence in Cape Town after Genadendal.

In 1996 the then *Netherlands Department for Conservation (Rijksdienst voor de Monumentenzorg)* commissioned Frits van Voorden to visit and report on Genadendal. His report formed the basis for an intergovernmental project, funded under the HGIS-Culture programme (Van Oers 2009, 8). The project included participation of the Delft University of Technology, the *Western Cape Cultural Commission* and the *Netherlands Department for Conservation*. The details of the project are not of interest to this essay; more interesting is the report compiled towards the end of the project in which the benefit of Dutch collaboration is clearly expanded on. This provides the first known mention of the → *Declaration of Amsterdam* in a text relating to conservation in South Africa since 1976. The five principles of the Declaration are presented as forming the basis of the *integrated conservation* methodology of the ‘Dutch approach’ which is described as “spatial-technical and design at various levels of scale” (Van Oers 2009, 8). The Genadendal experiment, which took place twenty-six years after the EAHY 1975, can be dubbed the first pilot project of ‘Integrated Conservation’ in South Africa. This project led to further opportunity for application of the principles of the Declaration in South Africa. The lessons learnt with regards the lack of expertise outside of Europe of the integrated approach to conservation influenced the strategic positioning of the Shared Cultural Heritage programme of the Netherlands Government.

The first South African project undertaken in the built environment under this new Shared Heritage programme was executed in Pretoria. This city underwent a marked transformation under influence of a relatively substantial influx of Dutch born and trained architects at the end of the nineteenth century. A student workshop was undertaken with the support of the *Cultural Heritage Agency* of the Netherlands as part of the 2009 *African Perspectives Conference* which hosted by the Department of Architecture at the University of Pretoria. The workshop was based on the *Quick Scan* method developed during the *Stadsvernieuwing* urban renewal programmes of the 1970’s. Since then three additional workshops have been undertaken in Pretoria, these in collaboration with the City of Tshwane Metropolitan Municipality and the National Department of Public Works. They highlighted the possibilities that lie in the applica-

tion of the *integrated conservation* approach for inner-city renewal. This engagement has come at a time when the city's role as capital is being re-imagined and the danger exists that the residue of the past might not be acknowledged for its intrinsic value.

5. CHANGES IN CONSERVATION LEGISLATION

The transition to a democratic South Africa brought about a re-appraisal of the past conservation practices. New conservation legislation, the *National Heritage Resources Act* (NHRA), was enacted in 1999. It provided, amongst others, for a review of the monuments register which had been skewed by the years of politically driven valorisation. It also legislated a new social role for conservation. The preamble resonates strongly with the first basic consideration of the Congress on European Architectural Heritage, that 'Europe's architectural heritage gives to her people the consciousness of their common history and common future' (Declaration of Amsterdam). The NHRA preamble echoes these thoughts: "Our heritage [...] helps us to define our cultural identity and therefore lies at the heart of our spiritual well-being and has the power to build our nation. It has the potential to affirm our diverse cultures, and in so doing shape our national character" (National Heritage Resources Act, Preamble). This legislation mandates local and national government to maintain heritage registers (Article 30) and makes provision for protection of not only building ensembles of but also heritage areas (Article 29) which requires that planners include investigation into potential protection of areas when revising town or regional planning schemes (Article 29). The Act unfortunately stops short in positioning conservation as an integral part of urban and regional planning, leaving it to local authorities to define individual approaches to the role of built heritage in development.

CONCLUSION

The EAHY 1975 went largely unnoticed in South Africa and its influence remained insignificant until the re-emergence of the country onto the international arena after the ending of Apartheid. Since then 'Integrated Conservation' perspectives have started to find a feeble foothold. South Africa is undergoing fast urbanisation, which is leading to rapid change in inner cities and the abandonment of small rural towns. Some cities such as Johannesburg are rebounding from years of decay, while others suffer further through continued degeneration. Ideas have second lives and the application of the lessons contained in the → *Declaration of Amsterdam* are more relevant in South Africa today than ever, and deserve a re-appraisal for use in the application of built heritage in service of society.

Authors Note

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¹ It is not clear if the excellent 1975 *Grahamstown: a Pilot Study in Conservation* report (Gledhill/Keatney/Peters 1975) was the result of this resolution. Responding to a request from the author, Walter Peters, co-author of the document, stated that he was "not particularly conscious" of the principles of integrated conservation while undertaking the study (personal email communication to author, March 5, 2015).