

# Integrating cultural landscape approaches in cultural heritage impact assessment

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## Abstract

Cultural heritage management (CHM) has mostly conceptualised its subject matter as consisting of spatially discrete sites or objects. Heritage items in this model are thus recognised as the archaeological traces of history. Legislation and the archaeological paradigm that, since the 1970s, has underpinned CHM and Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) in Australia all serve to reinforce this focus on spatially discrete sites. The separation of natural from cultural heritage management and in turn Indigenous from settler Australian heritage management further fragments the heritage record. This fragmentation, reflected in legislation and government structures, complicates our ability to provide an integrated analysis of the biophysical, social and cultural heritage impacts of development projects/strategies.

A cultural landscape approach offers an antidote to this fragmentation. It provides an opportunity to move away from a focus on objects and sites as ends in themselves, toward assessing/managing the material record and intangible heritage values in their historical, social and broader landscape contexts. The approach also offers opportunities to better integrate natural and cultural heritage impact assessment. This paper will consider how a set of cultural landscape principles, developed for application to protected area landscape management in New South Wales, Australia, could be usefully applied to the preparation of *Best Practice Principles of Cultural Heritage for Impact Assessment*.

## Introduction

The *cultural landscape* concept has been examined and discussed by heritage practitioners since the mid-1980s, but rarely applied in CHM. In 1992, the World Heritage Committee recognised 'cultural landscape' as a category of site within the World Heritage Convention's *Operational Guidelines* (Fowler 2003; Lennon 2005; Aplin 2007).<sup>2</sup> The cultural landscape concept recognises that the present landscape is the product of long-term and complex (inter)relationships between people and the environment and emphasises the landscape-scale of history (Brown 2007:34).<sup>3</sup>

A cultural landscape concept also emphasises the *connectivity* between people, places and heritage items.<sup>4</sup> However, understanding the social, historical and landscape-scale connections between heritage items is made problematic by adopting a site-based model. A site-based approach, deeply embedded in heritage

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<sup>2</sup> The specific context within which the World Heritage Committee applies the concept of cultural landscape is for the purposes of describing values and listing places on the World Heritage List. The concept is not applied to landscape management.

<sup>3</sup> For the purposes of this paper, cultural landscapes are defined as 'those areas which clearly represent or reflect the patterns of settlement or use of the landscape over a long time, as well as the evolution of cultural values, norms and attitudes toward the land' (Context et al 2002).

<sup>4</sup> The term 'heritage item' is used in this paper to refer collectively to heritage objects, 'sites', places and landscapes.

practice and heritage bureaucracies in Australia, serves to give focus to the material traces of history (physical remains) but also serves to limit our abilities to recognise the social values of objects and places and thus 'leads to a misrepresentation of cultural significance' (Byrne 2008:157).

This paper will present a number of principles that support the implementation of a cultural landscape concept. While the principles have been developed specifically for application to the management of protected areas in New South Wales (NSW), Australia, they can have application to integrated landscape management more broadly, including to cultural heritage and impact assessment.

## **Cultural landscapes and protected areas**

Cultural heritage (CH) research within the Department of Environment and Climate Change (DECC)<sup>5</sup> has promoted a holistic approach that seeks to integrate Indigenous, settler Australian (of various ethnic backgrounds) and natural values of landscapes and to ensure the inclusion of social significance alongside archaeological, historical and architectural values. Because of the innovative nature of this research work there are many challenges to be faced in getting the new approach adopted within a protected area management framework.

Some elements of the research that support the adoption of a cultural landscape framework include:

- Understanding history (including shared history) and larger patterns of land use at a whole-of-landscape scale. That is, understanding the history represented in all landscapes within local, State and national contexts. For example, the documentation and analysis of the 'meta-landscapes' of grazing (Harrison 2004) and recreation (Kijas 2006).
- Documenting the histories of communities that have historic and contemporary social attachments to cultural landscapes. This requires an understanding of the mobility of people across landscapes, the way in which people, places and landscapes are connected and the ways people have formed attachments to landscape (Veale 2001).
- An emphasis on the spatial aspects of cultural landscapes, including spatial patterns or connectivity that can be mapped (Byrne and Nugent 2004). This includes the development of mapping products, for use in cultural heritage management, that represent all of the landscape as cultural (Moyle et al in press).

Research is currently being undertaken within the DECC to further explore how the agency should manage the history and heritage of landscapes.<sup>6</sup> An important and innovative aspect of this work is the preparation of an operational guide to managing cultural landscapes. One output of the project has been the development of principles that can support an operational approach to recognising, documenting and managing cultural landscapes that make up protected areas in NSW (Brown 2008). Five principles are listed below.

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<sup>5</sup> The DECC is a NSW state government agency. Part of the agency comprises the National Parks and Wildlife Service, which was incorporated into the Department of Environment and Conservation in 2003 and subsequently into the DECC in April 2007.

<sup>6</sup> Information on the Cultural Landscapes Research Project is available from <http://www.nationalparks.nsw.gov.au/npws.nsf/Content/cultural+landscapes+project>

## Principles

1. Landscape is a living entity, and is the product of change, dynamic patterns and evolving inter-relationships between past ecosystems, history and cultures.
2. The interactions between people and landscape are complex, multi-layered and are distinctive to each space and time.
3. Multiple engagement and dialogue, where all peoples' values are noticed and respected, are characteristic of a cultural landscape mentality.<sup>7</sup>
4. All parts of Australia's landscape have community connection and associated values and meanings.
5. A key part of understanding cultural landscapes is through the continuity of past and present.

These principles may have a wider application and could be used to inform the documentation and values assessment utilised in the process of CH impact assessment for the purposes of Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) and Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA).<sup>8</sup>

## Discussion

In order to consider the adoption of a cultural landscape concept, there is a need to ensure that there is a common understanding of the terms *culture*, *cultural heritage* and *landscape*. In this short paper there is insufficient space to explore or examine the history and contemporary usage of these complex concepts.<sup>9</sup> However, a number of key points will be made in relation to these concepts because they bear upon the identification and assessment of the cultural significance of heritage items and consequently the assessment of development impacts.

First, in the field of CH there has been a tendency to privilege the physical over the social (Byrne 2008:158). That is, for CH impact assessment the physical or material dimensions of objects and places are emphasised, which is understandable given that archaeologists and architects are regularly engaged in the identification and assessment process. Thus heritage items in Australia are typically recognised as the physical remains of past occupation – Indigenous scarred trees and stone artefacts, in-tact standing or ruinous structures (such as buildings, stock yards, fences, bridges, log loading ramps), landscape features (quarries, water channels), cultural plantings and moveable heritage items (machinery, furniture).

However, this approach fails to recognise that heritage is a field of social/cultural action (see discussion in Byrne 2008). A consequence of this view is that all physical traces of history will have meanings to contemporary communities (Principle 4) and therefore cannot be 'siloed' in a process of impact assessment. For example, Indigenous stone artefacts have been traditionally considered in impact assessment as archaeological heritage, associated with deep-time and authentic 'traditional'

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<sup>7</sup> Principle derived from Fairclough 2002:3.

<sup>8</sup> In NSW, for example, an Aboriginal Heritage Impact Permit (AHIP) is required if an activity is likely to impact on Indigenous objects or places. The DECC issues AHIPs under part 6 of the *National Parks and Wildlife Act 1974*.

<sup>9</sup> For a discussion of the history and usage of these terms see, for example, Byrne (2008), Brown (2008), Hicks, McAtackney and Fairclough (2007) and Johnson (2007).

Indigenous settlement, somehow disconnected from present communities. However, in Australia any stone artefact will have meaning and cultural significance to a contemporary Indigenous group or community (Principle 5).

A second point to be made, which is also a consequence of a focus on the material traces of heritage, is the failure to use history to document community associations with landscape. In Australia, history has generally been used in CH impact assessment as an adjunct to documenting the physical traces of history – that is, to describe technological processes (for example related to mining, industry and agriculture) and outline land-use and building histories rather than to explain community attachments to place and the connectivity between places across the landscape. In effect, archaeologists and architects have failed to use their disciplines to explain history holistically.<sup>10</sup>

The failure in CH impact assessment to consider the social and historical dimensions of landscape is, in part, explained in Australia by a legislative and governance context that has effectively remained unchanged since the 1970s. Consequently, there has been no impetus for consultant practitioners in the field of CH impact assessment to change with respect to new thinking in cultural heritage management (for example, Fairclough et al 2008).

There is thus an opportunity for CH practitioners to take a leadership role in defining and implementing best practice approaches in CH impact assessment, as well as collaborating with government in the development of such approaches. I have argued in this short paper that the adoption of a cultural landscape approach, which incorporates the social and historical dimensions of landscape, is one way in which this can be achieved. This approach would require the preparation of histories that identify, document and contextualise the tangible and intangible heritage values of landscapes and document past and present community attachments. Environmental histories are also required that document and explain landscape-scale human-environmental interactions. Together, social and environmental histories have the potential to link our knowledge of cultural heritage with that of ecosystems and communities necessary to provide an integrated analysis of the biophysical, social and cultural heritage impacts of development projects/strategies.

## Conclusion

The idea of landscape can be utilised to connect biophysical and social conditions with the materiality and humanism of cultural heritage. Landscape as an idea can therefore be used to capture the complex, usually political, intersections between human attachment to places and the past. By adopting an integrated and broad view of 'environment', impacts on heritage items, whether Indigenous peoples' stone artefacts or settler Australian pastoral properties, will also necessitate impacts on the biophysical and social spheres. Therefore, rather than conceptualising cultural heritage as 'separate' in impact assessment, the connectivity between ecology, heritage and communities needs to be recognised from the onset in the development of *Best Practice Principles of Cultural Heritage for Impact Assessment*. A cultural

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<sup>10</sup> In the case of archaeology, Smith (2004:34) argues that the logical positivism of the New Archaeology of the 1960/70s 'repositioned archaeology away from its early twentieth-century associations with history, and aligned it with the natural sciences', which in Australian consulting archaeology largely remains the situation today.

landscape concept provides a mechanism for achieving integrated landscape assessment.

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