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Measuring the intangible: towards enviro-cultural justice
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Abstract

Although this concept of environmental justice is provided for in South African legislation, Impact Assessment professionals have not widely recognised the importance of cultural services and values, with very few cultural impact assessments being undertaken.

To allow for greater inclusion of intangible cultural heritage or intangible evidence, two approaches have been explored. The first model was developed by the Australia International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS), i.e. the Burra Charter. The second is the four-step DIVE-analysis (Describe, Interpret, Valuate and Enable) which is based on the need to understand the entire landscape rather than separate fragments (Zancheti *et al.*, 2004).

This study has shown that, within South Africa, the decision-making process and policy framework has been skewed towards a technocratic approach that has led to the field of Impact Assessment struggling to acknowledge intangible aspects of the environment as valid forms of information. The above methods can be used to address this shortcoming.

Keywords: Intangible, Cultural heritage, EIA, South Africa

Introduction

The internationally recognized principle of environmental justice referred to a social movement that focused on the fair distribution of environmental benefits and burdens (Schlosberg, 2007). The environmental justice movement has particularly opposed traditional methods of environmental impact assessment (EIA) as discriminating against marginalised communities by ignoring cumulative and multiple exposures and hazards. This has also lead to an exclusion of local knowledge through an expert-driven, top-down environmental planning process (Corburn, 2002; Faber and Krieg, 2002; Fox et al., 2002; Hillman, 2004).

The Millennium Ecosystem Assessment (2005) has already called for policy formulations to empower local people to participate in managing natural resources as part of a cultural landscape, integrating local knowledge and institutions. There is overall recognition of the strong influence that ecosystem change can have on cultural identity and social stability (MA, 2005). In this respect, human cultures, knowledge systems, religions, heritage values, social interactions, and the linked amenity services (such as aesthetic enjoyment, recreation, artistic and spiritual fulfilment, and intellectual development) have always been influenced and shaped by the nature of the ecosystem and ecosystem conditions (MA, 2005). However, many of these benefits are being degraded, either through changes to ecosystems or through societal changes (such as the loss of languages or of

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traditional knowledge) that reduce people's recognition or appreciation of those cultural benefits (MA, 2005). According to the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment (2005), this loss in culturally valued ecosystems and landscapes can contribute to social disruptions and societal marginalisation which limits the level of environmental justice for that society. The Millennium Ecosystem Assessment (2005) therefore calls for policy formulations to empower local people to participate in managing natural resources as part of a cultural landscape, by integrating local knowledge and institutions.

Problem statement

In South Africa, there is a need for Impact Assessment professionals to increase the level at which intangible aspects of the environment, i.e. intangible cultural heritage is incorporated into the decision-making process. Historically, the EIA process in South Africa has mainly followed an evidence-based decision-making framework, which relies on hard evidence (i.e. physical tangible heritage) to avoid making decisions around the management of natural resources. It is argued that this evidence-based decision-making framework may hinder environmental justice by not considering intangible cultural values as "evidence" in the EIA decision-making framework. In this sense, Schroeder (2013) contends that decision-making must not by-pass the implicit level of experience or ignore or lose touch with the felt value that underlies held and assigned values and calls for decision-making processes to include implicit, felt level of experience.

The terms tangible and intangible came into popular use, particularly since UNESCO (2003) adopted the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage. Article 2 of the UNESCO Convention (2003) defines intangible cultural heritage as: "the practice, representations, expressions, knowledge, skills, as well as the instruments, objects, artefacts and cultural spaces associated therewith, that communities, groups and, in some cases, individuals recognise as part of their cultural heritage. This intangible cultural heritage, transmitted from generation to generation, is constantly recreated by communities and groups in response to their environment, their interaction with nature and their history, and provides them with a sense of identity and continuity, thus promoting respect for cultural diversity and human creativity."

Methods

To allow for greater inclusion of intangible cultural heritage or intangible evidence, two approaches have been explored. The first model was developed by the Australia International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS), i.e. the Burra Charter, which is an adaptable model for site management that advocates for the integration of local cultural values. The main principles and procedures are based on the recognition of cultural significance, the associations between places and people, the importance of the meaning of places to people and the need to respect the co-existence of various cultural values, involving conflicts of interests and the co-management of cultural and natural significance of the same place (Burra Charter, 2013). Specifically, the Burra Charter (2013) calls for the acknowledgement that cultural values should co-exist, especially in cases where they conflict as it may affect policy development and management decisions. In this context, the term cultural values refers to those beliefs which are important to a cultural group, including but not limited to political, religious, spiritual and moral beliefs. This is broader than values associated with cultural significance (Burra Charter, 2013).

According to ICOMOS (2017), intangible cultural heritage arise from every cultural group and among other things are defined by cultural practices that reflect peoples' response to the environment, history and cultural settings. The importance of cultural practices is determined by the communities and groups of people for whom these practices form part of their cultural heritage, and are therefore an 'intangible cultural heritage' as defined in the UNESCO Convention (ICOMOS, 2017)..

The UNESCO Convention (2003) defines five domains in which intangible cultural heritage can be manifested (Table 1-1):

Table 1-1: Five domains of intangible cultural heritage

Oral traditions and expressions	I.e. songs, poems, stories, riddles and rhymes, pass on knowledge, social and cultural values, share collective memory and keep spoken language alive.
Performance	I.e. performing arts such as vocal and instrumental music, dance, theatre, along with sports.
Social practices, rituals and festive events	A wide variety of activities that help reaffirm the shared identity of those who practice them. Often, they mark changes or cycles, and commemorate or link to history and memory.
Knowledge and practices concerning nature	Including knowledge, knowhow, skills, practices and representations developed by communities through their interaction with the natural environment. They strongly influence values and beliefs and underlie many social practices and cultural traditions at a place, and are shaped by the natural environment and the community's wider world.
Traditional craft skills	I.e. the skills and knowledge involved in the production and maintenance of objects, art works, food and elements of buildings and places.

The Burra Charter (2013) process therefore recommends a series of steps that should be followed to better incorporate intangible cultural values into a decision-making framework. The sequence of steps requires the decision-maker to collect and analyse information to understand the cultural significance, the next step entails the development of policy for managing a place based on this understanding. Policy development should also consider other factors affecting the future of a place such as the owner's needs, resources, external constraints and its physical condition (Burra Charter, 2013). In developing an effective policy, the Burra Charter also proposes that different ways to retain cultural significance should be explored.

The implementation of this process, has however, been hampered by the fact that intangible cultural heritage is often overlooked in the assessment of impacts (ICOMOS, 2017). This is because the concept of intangible cultural heritage is not well understood, and is often overlooked in heritage assessments. To prevent intangible cultural heritage from being overlooked, the investigation of cultural practices that relate to a place should form part of understanding the place and its cultural significance (ICOMOS, 2017). The relationship between the fabric of the place and the cultural practices also need to be investigated (ICOMOS, 2017).

The Burra Charter also identified the need for cultural practices to be recognised as important contributors to the cultural significance of a place as well as the need for it to be considered or assessed (ICOMOS, 2017). The Burra Charter Practice Note "Understanding and assessing cultural significance" (ICOMOS, 2013) identifies common issues in assessing significance, including 'the importance of involving communities, cultural groups and individuals associated with the place, and the recognition of intangible heritage'. The Burra Charter further recommends that, in documenting a place, each aspect of the place should be addressed: for example, history, development sequence, physical form and layout, community associations, cultural practices etc. ((ICOMOS, 2017). It is important to consider that the sum of these aspects represents the totality of the place, and an integrated analysis should therefore precede the assessment of cultural significance (ICOMOS, 2017). In this regard, the Burra Charter requires that the attributes of the place that relates to the cultural practices (e.g. spaces and access to them, contents, and related places and objects) be identified (ICOMOS, 2017). Further to this, cultural practices may contribute to the aesthetic, historical, scientific, social and spiritual significance of a place and any changes to the place might impact on cultural practices. Any changes to the cultural practices may affect the cultural significance of the place (ICOMOS, 2017). In order to ensure enviro-cultural justice, the Burra Charter advocates that the cultural practices that contribute to the significance of a place be sustained; in accordance with the desires and participation of the relevant community (ICOMOS, 2017). Since these intangible cultural practices cannot be separated from the place, the ultimate conservation of the place will hinge on the ability of government or project implementers to sustain these cultural practices (ICOMOS, 2017).

The second approach for allowing greater inclusion of intangible values is the four-step DIVE-analysis (Describe, Interpret, Valuate and Enable) which is based on the need to understand the entire landscape rather than separate fragments (Zancheti et al., 2004). The DIVE-analysis recognises that cultural heritage is an irreplaceable source of knowledge about historical development, people's relationships with each other and nature, past access to and use of resources, economy and patterns of use, and social, religious and ritualistic life (Zancheti et al., 2004).

The analysis is mainly used to clarify, but also classify, which social, economic, cultural and physical features have been and are important for the area's development, which physical traits have played and continue to play a key functional and symbolic role, and which are of secondary importance (Zancheti et al., 2004). Within this framework, there is a variety of criteria that can be used to evaluate the value of a cultural heritage site. Knowledge value for example is evaluated on the basis of its representativeness, context, authenticity, physical condition, etc. In the DIVE analysis, information from the first two stages of knowledge collection and interpretation forms the foundation for assessing how an area's historical character and significance, legibility, authenticity and integrity all contribute towards an overall cultural evaluation (Zancheti et al., 2004). According to Zancheti et al., (2004), the value of the cultural heritage is considered as a reflection of the social and cultural contexts that frames it.

At the heart of the DIVE-analysis is interdisciplinary cooperation and participation (i.e. in the form of public meetings, surveys, or workshops), which lends to the legitimacy and desired impact of the exercise (Zancheti et al., 2004). In addition to the participatory aspect of this approach, the DIVE-analysis process involves supplementing the collected information with site specific knowledge

provided by individuals and groups who have diverse local knowledge and skills. Equally important is effective and scientific communication of the process, deliberations and results of the analysis (Zancheti *et al*., 2004).

Conclusion

Within South Africa, the rationalist and modernist view of evidence have skewed the decision-making process and policy framework towards a technocratic approach that mainly rely on verifiable scientific information. An over-reliance on a cognitive approach to knowledge has led to the field of Impact Assessment struggling to acknowledging intangible aspects as valid forms of information.

To ensure a greater integration of intangible cultural knowledge into the decision-making process, the use of alternative assessment methods such as those described in the Burra Charter and the DIVE-analysis can be used to describe, understand and evaluate intangible aspects of the environment and assist in including different perspectives on evidence. In conjunction with these methods, there is a need to incorporate a systems thinking approach into the decision-making framework. The systems thinking approach views aspects of the environment as parts of an overall system, rather than reacting to specific part, outcomes or events and potentially contributing to further development of unintended consequences (Environment and Ecology, 2017). By employing these approaches, the field of Impact Assessment professionals would be able to ensure enviro-cultural justice to vulnerable and indigenous communities.

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