

A manifesto is a ‘public declaration or proclamation, usually issued ... by an individual or body of individuals whose proceedings are of public importance, for the purpose of making known past actions, and explaining the reasons or motives for actions announced as forthcoming’.¹ A manifesto is also often intended as a provocation or as an articulation of a particular view in the context of public argument or controversy. In this instance, this manifesto contributes to the currently wide-ranging arguments in South Africa regarding conservation of the built environment and, in particular, regarding heritage management. It is also an articulation of one set of the ideas underpinning teaching in the Master in Philosophy in Conservation of the Built Environment programme of the School of Architecture, Planning and Geomatics of the Faculty of Engineering and the Built Environment at the University of Cape Town, which I have convened from its inception in 2009.

In the past few decades, heritage – be it tangible heritage resources or intangible cultural activities and practices – has become an increasingly public interest; the underpinning ideas and practices have been scrutinised by ever-wider, disparate fields of concern, provoking ever-sharper controversy. Indeed, the arena is characterised by conflict and uncertainty – much of it terminological, but much of it regarding underpinning values.

Given that the claim of heritage implies a sense of ownership different from, and often at odds with, the holding of title to the land accommodating the heritage, it is inevitable that such claims will provoke tension and anxiety. These tensions often pit communal identity against socioeconomic good.

Given this, I present this manifesto as a statement of my position in respect of the conservation, development and protection of heritage resources, be they relics, buildings, sites, places, cultural landscapes/ townscapes and/or environments. This manifesto is in large part reliant on and based on similar ‘manifestoes’, like the international charters on restoration and conservation. I acknowledge them as best I can;² but I also recognise that the sociopolitical environment, the physical/built environment and the relics, buildings, sites, places, cultural landscapes/townscapes and/or environments, and the developmental needs in South Africa are unique. As a consequence, the identification of heritage and the protection, management and use/development of such relics, buildings, sites, places, cultural landscapes/ townscapes and/or environments here requires a locally contingent approach³ in which the heterogeneity of our national psyche, and of the heritage-claiming communities, must be recognised and responded to.

THE MANIFESTO

‘Conservation’ is all of the processes and actions involved in the research and articulation of significance; the

recognition or identification of the resource including its context; the actions aimed at transmitting the significance(s) into the future, including the enhancing of and/or adding to those significances. It includes the processes of monitoring, interpreting and caring for the resource; and it includes the protection and development of defined heritage resources.⁴

Heritage and heritage resources are never intrinsically so: heritage is a cultural construct established by individuals, groups, communities and nations who associate certain meanings and significances with the physical; the relics, buildings, sites, places, cultural landscapes/townscapes and/or environments that are deemed to be heritage.⁵

OFTEN, HOWEVER, HERITAGE IS THE RELIC OF PREVIOUS OR PAST REGIMES. IT IS ALSO TRUE THAT ‘THE CULTURAL HERITAGE OF EACH IS THE CULTURAL HERITAGE OF ALL’.

The meanings and significances associated with and establishing the physical as heritage are wide-ranging and are derived from the cultural values of the individuals, groups, communities and nations claiming the physical as heritage. These values include those regarding art and inventiveness (including but not only formal and informal, fine and craft), architecture (including but not only traditional, modern, vernacular), history (including but not only political, artistic, architectural, technological, settlement-making), identity (including but not only personal, group, community, national, religious, race, gender). In other words, there are no limits to the range and nature of meanings and significances that can be associated with the physical.

Heritage and heritage resources can, therefore, only (or in the first instance) be identified as such by individuals, groups, communities and/or the nation who associate meanings and significances with the physical. In practice, however, such identifications are usually articulated and/or made by ‘experts’, special-interest groups and/or the heritage authorities who, in effect, make claims for the ‘heritage-claimant’ groups. Often, however, heritage is the relic of previous or past regimes.

It is also true that ‘the cultural heritage of each is the cultural heritage of all’.⁶ While this may be true in a wide sense, this is rationally relevant only with respect to heritage of great(er) significance and with particular kinds of significances – for example, heritage resources of great historical, scientific and/or artistic significance, where the primary attribute of authenticity is a ‘documentary’ one as ‘historical evidence’. >