

Cultural heritage solutions for water management

A new horizon for ICOMOS Japan?

Henk van Schaik¹ and Diederik Six²

ICOMOS Netherlands

Introduction

On the 3rd February, an international symposium on Water and Culture took place in Tokyo, organised by GRIPS (National Graduate Institute for Policy Studies) and ICOMOS Netherlands.

The objectives were to:

- Showcase the beauty of water related cultural heritage; and
- Discuss the significance of water related culture in the context of the water challenges of today and tomorrow.

The symposium was designed to establish a new horizon for global and local water management dialogues and to promote recognition of cultural heritage in the pursuit of the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), in particular those related to water. It is hoped that momentum generated at the Tokyo symposium will continue through Water and Culture Heritage dialogues at international events including the Asia Pacific Water Summit in 2020, the 9th World Water Forum in 2021 in Dakar, Senegal, the United Nations Global Platform on Disaster Resilience and Reduction, the 4th UN Special Thematic Session on Water and Disasters, the UN High-Level Meeting on Water in 2021, and the UN Water Decade's Mid-Term Review in 2023, .

Organised by Prof. Kenzo Hiroki, Coordinator of the High Level Experts and Leaders Panel on Water and Disasters (HELP), and Henk van Schaik, Ambassador Water and Heritage for ICOMOS Netherlands, the symposium was honoured by the attendance of Their Majesties the Emperor and Empress of Japan who showed deep interest in the discussion on water and culture. The participants included Japanese and international water professionals and heritage experts from all continents.

On the 4th of February, symposium speakers and some invited guests discussed the way forward and prepared a Chair's statement. The first recommendation of the Statement is that ICOMOS develop narratives for water managers to understand the significance of cultural heritage in the management of water for the future.

Background

The focus of Japan on Water and Culture goes back to World Water Forum 3, which was held in Kyoto in 2003. In the Action Plan of the Water and Cultural Diversity Statement in the Final Report of the Forum, Japan calls for the creation of a specific working group to examine the relationship between water and culture (including aspects of cultural diversity and heritage). This proposal was supported by the Memorial Speech of his Imperial Highness the Crown Prince of Japan who focused on Lake Biwa since the 8th Century AD in highlighting the importance of water transport heritage in the development of Japan, and Kyoto in particular.

Since the World Water Forum in Japan no follow up action had been taken.

¹ Henk van Schaik, Ambassador Water and Heritage, ICOMOS Netherlands

² Diederik Six, Past President and Water Heritage Envoy, ICOMOS Netherlands

Involvement of ICOMOS

In 2012 ICOMOS Netherlands started an initiative to communicate the relevance of water related cultural heritage to water managers and policy makers, and to broaden the scope of heritage experts from heritage protection and conservation towards consideration of the importance of heritage in addressing present and future water challenges. The initiative started with an international conference that brought together over 100 water specialists and heritage experts from all continents. The conference 'Water and Heritage. Protecting Deltas: Heritage Helps' took place in Amsterdam in 2013. The conference resulted in a publication, *Water & Heritage: Material, conceptual and spiritual connections*ⁱ, and the creation of an awareness shield for Water and Heritage in which blue represents water, red represents cultural heritage and white represents the inspiration of cultural heritage for water management challenges.

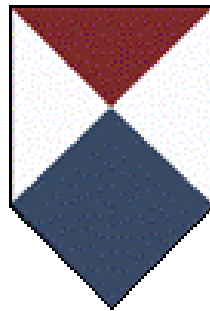


Figure 1: The Water and Heritage Awareness shield

This publication was followed by a second, *Adaptive strategies for Water Heritage*ⁱⁱ, the outcome of the conference 'Water and Heritage for the Future' which was held in November 2016 in Delft and Fort Vechten, Netherlands. This conference was organised in cooperation with the Chair of History of Architecture and Urban Development of the Technical University of Delft.

This new and broadened understanding of cultural heritage has since attracted interest and support both in the heritage community and among water managers. The 2017 ICOMOS General Assembly in New Delhi, India approved initiation of the development of an International Scientific Committee (ISC) for Water and Heritage. Recently the Task Force for the development of the ISC surveyed ICOMOS National Committees and ISCs on their interest and support for such an ISC, and this revealed that there is broad interest and support for the initiative. The Task Force is currently preparing a Charter, identifying membership and developing a program of activities. The ISC Water and Heritage was to be formally endorsed at the General Assembly in December 2020 in Sydney Australia, and it is still intended to work towards establishment by that time.

A important advancement in the international water community was May 2019 UNESCO Water conference in Paris where, for the first time, a dedicated session was held on Water and Cultural Heritage. This conference called for the continuation of the dialogue between water professionals and heritage experts on the significance of water related cultural heritage for overcoming water challenges.

Symposium highlights

Minister Minorikawa, State Minister of Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism, Government of Japan

In the High Level segment of the symposium, Minister Minorikawa stressed that we cannot grasp our history, and probably our future, without a clear understanding of the relationship between water and people. He made mention of the River Law of 1896 in Japan, that laid the foundations for the cooperative use of water and rules on consolation during droughts. He highlighted how such laws

establishing cooperative uses between neighbouring countries are seminal to the world's water heritage.

H.E. Mr. Shinichi Nakatani, Parliamentary Vice-Minister for Foreign Affairs of Japan

The Vice Minister started his speech by introducing the close relationship between water and culture in the history of Japan. He cited the example of the UNESCO World Heritage listed Mt. Fuji, where people appreciate their life with the volcano and natural springs based on a tradition of beliefs and rituals called sangaku shinko, meaning "mountain creed". He also talked about Japan's contribution to the preservation and restoration of cultural heritage internationally, including specifically at Angkor Wat in Cambodia.

Prof. Kono, President of ICOMOS

Prof. Kono deplored that economic growth has come at the cost of traditional heritage. He hailed the timeliness of the symposium citing the UN SDGs' guiding principle that we must continually revisit our relationship with water.

Mr. Shinichi Kitaoka, President of the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA)

President Kitaoka stated that water is the most important foundation for achieving human security. He paid tribute to Dr. Tetsu Nakamura who devoted his life to improving irrigation systems in Afghanistan by applying the wisdom of the Yamada Zeki, a traditional weir from Fukuoka Prefecture, thus exemplifying primitive, but practical, technologies that can effectively use local resources.

Other telling examples of the significance of water related cultural heritage, material, conceptual, spiritual and intangible, for today's water management challenges were presented from the Netherlands, India, Thailand, China, Brazil, Ghana, Australia, Indonesia and Pakistan. With reference to the world's principal faiths and indigenous cultures, speakers from the US, Japan and Brazil informed the symposium participants about the relevance of spiritual and religious values even for today's water management challenges. The power of building iconic visions about rivers through, as an example, walking rivers from source to mouth was asserted.

Symposium conclusion and Chair's statement

The symposium concluded recognising that there are fundamental challenges to convincingly inform water managers about the significance of water related heritage for present and future water management challenges. These are due to disciplinary and institutional divides, but the symposium demonstrated that there are telling examples from all over the world that can be used to start closing these gaps, although this will take time. In his closing address, the Chair called upon the symposium participants to join the Water and Heritage initiative. He informed the participants that a Chair's statement will be prepared and circulated to the participants, and hoped that all participants would commit to the implementation of its recommendations.

Essential follow up

In addition to the setting up of the ICOMOS ISC Water and Heritage, it is essential to develop a portfolio of telling examples showcasing the significance of water related heritage for present and future water management challenges at local, national and international level.

In the Netherlands a set of activities are starting up to substantiate the significance of water related heritage for water resources management, water services, waterways, water for power and water visions and values.

The symposium asked whether ICOMOS Japan would also be willing to consider developing such a portfolio in collaboration and close contact with leading water policy, operations as well as research and knowledge institutions, and this question is now extended to committees of ICOMOS globally.

Henk van Schaik

ⁱ Water & Heritage, material conceptual and spiritual connections, Willems WJH and van Schaik HPJ (ed) (2015), Sidestone Press, Leiden, Netherlands.

ⁱⁱ Hein, C (ed) (2020) Adaptive strategies for water heritage, past, present and future' Springer (2020)