



Communication and Marketing Department
Isebe loThungelwano neNtengiso
Kommunikasie en Bemerkingsdepartement

Private Bag X3, Rondebosch 7701, South Africa
Welgelegen House, Chapel Road Extension, Rosebank, Cape Town
Tel: +27 (0) 21 650 5427/5428/5674 Fax: +27 (0) 21 650 5628

www.uct.ac.za

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Conference relooks at marginalised and overlooked African heritage

The University of Cape Town (UCT) along with UNESCO, the African World Heritage Fund and the University College London's (UCL) Bartlett School of Architecture this week hosted the "Symposium on Modern Heritage of Africa (MoHoA)" to address, among other things, the challenges in defining modern heritage of, and in, Africa which is often overlooked and marginalised in literature and global records.

A document presented by participants of MoHoA at the conference assembled in Cape Town, acknowledged the initiative of UCT and the support of UCL in providing "the knowledge that recognises the vital role of Africa in contributing ways and means of broadening our horizons to bring greater respect for and understanding of contemporary heritage".

At the conference, held from 22–24 September, Professor Shadreck Chirikure, director of the UCT Heritage Hub said: "We are geographically located in Africa but we engage globally," emphasising the importance of an African voice in global discussions on heritage.

Despite its planetary impact, the 'modern' era and its legacies are comparatively undervalued and overlooked, and disproportionately concentrated and interpreted in 'the west'. The African World Heritage Fund has identified modern heritage as amongst the most marginalised heritage categories on the continent, demanding investment in research and documentation to increase resilience and subsequently Africa's representation on the UNESCO World Heritage List.

The document supports efforts to modify international policy and guidance on modern heritage in line with present and future planetary challenges of ecological, social and economic equity. The intention is for it to be presented to the World Heritage Committee as part of the reporting exercise, and contribute to changing the current underrepresentation of the African continent.

Among the themes covered in the three-day conference were: Globality and Universal Relevance; Heritage, Sustainability and Environment; Infrastructure and Immateriality of the Built Environment; Pedagogy and Heritage; De-centering Official Heritage; Heritage, Conflict and Change; Past and Present in Heritage; and Urban Heritage, Colonialism and Modernity.

The document expressed the necessity in “broadening of understandings of modern heritage so that it equitably reflects the experiences of all societies and their encounters as exhibited by social and traditional practices, the creation of heritage through the interconnections between culture and nature, historic urban landscapes, and tangible and intangible cultural values”.

“In developing this document we celebrate the 20th anniversary of the UNESCO *Modern Heritage Programme* and build upon debates and definitions of Modern Heritage related to the implementation of the 1972 World Heritage Convention, including, inter alia, the 2004 Regional Meeting on Modern Heritage for Sub-Saharan Africa, World Heritage Centre (2015), African Modern Heritage, International Committee for Documentation and Conservation of Buildings (DOCOMOMO) (2016), International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS) 20th Century Architecture (2017), Twentieth Century Thematic Framework, Getty (2021),” reads the document.

The organisers added that the document is presented to align with and supplement existing conventions and recommendations, including the *UNESCO Recommendation on the Historic Urban Landscape*, ICOMOS Culture in the Implementation of the 2030 Agenda, the *UN Sustainable Development Goals*, *The Ngorongoro Declaration* on sustainable development, the *Culture Urban Future* and the *New Urban Agenda*, and elaborate on how they may contribute to safeguarding heritage to make our environments and resources safe, inclusive, resilient and sustainable.

ENDS

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Thami Nkwanyane

Media Liaison and Monitoring Officer

Communication and Marketing Department

University of Cape Town

Rondebosch

Tel: (021) 650 5672

Cell: 0725639500

Email: thami.nkwanyane@uct.ac.za

Website: www.uct.ac.za