



GET THE FACTS - HERITAGE INFORMATION SERIES

22. INTANGIBLE HERITAGE

'Intangible heritage' is a term used to describe aesthetic, spiritual, symbolic or other social values that people may associate with a site, as well as rituals, music, language, know-how, oral traditions and the cultural spaces in which these 'living heritage' traditions are played out. Gradual but tentative acceptance of the importance of intangible heritage internationally can be illustrated by three key moments of change: the acceptance of symbolic value as the prime reason for inscription of Auschwitz as a World

Heritage Site in 1979; the acceptance of 'cultural landscapes' as heritage-worthy in the World Heritage Convention (WHC) Guidelines in 1992; and the rethinking of UNESCO's 1989 'Recommendation on the Safeguarding of Traditional Culture and Folklore' in the 1990s that resulted in the launching of a new Intangible Heritage Convention in 2003. The 1992 modifications to the WHC Guidelines allowed for the recognition that cultural meanings associated with natural phenomena, such as the spiritual

indigenous landscapes in Australia, are worthy of World Heritage status. Robben Island off the coast of Cape Town, South Africa was inscribed as a World Heritage Site in 1999. Its listing embodies 'the triumph of the human spirit over adversity' – the place where Nelson Mandela spent 18 years of his life as a political prisoner under the Apartheid regime.