

**Les Méduses dans la Marée de l'Histoire:  
L'Anse aux Meadows, Nan Sdins and Cultural Heritage Agendas**

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**Abstract:** This paper reflects upon the relation of island communities to global cultural heritage agendas through discussion of two particular examples, the first two island locations successfully nominated by the Canadian government for UNESCO World Heritage listing: L'Anse aux Meadows, on Newfoundland, and Nan Sdins (Ninstints)<sup>1</sup> on SGang Gwaii<sup>2</sup>. This reflection involves discussion of the motives and discourses that led to their formal establishment as cultural heritage sites and those that have come into play in subsequent social inscriptions and interpretations. This line of inquiry intersects with – and is illuminated by – a consideration of the spatial contexts of the island networks that have facilitated particular moments upon which their heritage status is based. In particular, I refer to their relation to sea-lanes and coastal/inter-island lines of contact that are, in turn, predicated on particular moments of climatic, navigational and socio-economic history. The paper concludes by offering a point of mediation between traditional concepts of heritage agendas and socio-cultural development in island communities pertinent to the development of Island Studies as an activist enterprise.

*Keywords:* Haida Gwaii, heritage, islands, l'Anse aux Meadows, Nan Sdins, Newfoundland, UNESCO

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## **Introduction**

At its simplest, cultural heritage can be defined as an aggregation of tangible (that is, material) and/or intangible (that is, immaterial) artifacts produced by previous societies that has been deemed significant by present-day societies and/or institutions. As will be evident, this simple description belies complex issues concerning the processes by which relevant aspects are identified and classified as heritage commodities; the bodies that accomplish this; the ideologies that inform them; and the results and consequences of 'heritagization'. While contemporary renditions of heritage may present themselves with a veneer of objectivity, they – and the values underlying them – are subject to serial reappraisal and, often, revision. One such reappraisal was initiated in 1972 when UNESCO adopted the Convention Concerning the Protection of World Cultural and Natural Heritage

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<sup>1</sup> 'Nan Sdins' is the preferred Haida spelling, being closer to the phonetic pronunciation of the location's name in Haida language – 'Ninstints' was more commonly used in earlier English Language usage. The site is also commonly referred to in terms of its island location in contemporary Haida usage.

<sup>2</sup> Also known in English Language as 'Anthony's Island' and also spelt as 'Skung' Gwaii.

and subsequently initiated a register of World Heritage sites and mechanisms for locations to be nominated, assessed and ratified that were implemented in 1978. As befits a specifically internationalist body, the Convention stressed its address to the “common heritage of humanity” (without providing any definition of that problematic unitary entity). This article contributes to the unfolding process of heritage development by reappraising two of the earliest successful UNESCO heritage nominations, for Canada’s L’Anse aux Meadows and Nan Sdins sites, in the light of subsequent developments of the areas and of political discourses involved in identifications with the imagined pasts they have been perceived to represent. In developing these arguments the article also reflects on the islandness of the locations, the relevance of this aspect to Island Studies more generally and on the extent to which international heritage agendas (as they have been applied in recent decades) can be seen as productive for indigenous societies and politics in the locations concerned.

### **L’Anse aux Meadows**

The L’Anse aux Meadows heritage site is located on the shore of a small bay on the western tip of Newfoundland’s northern peninsula. Like many places in the province, the current name of the location dates from early European exploration of the island. As the first and second words suggest, the place name has a French origin. In time – and particularly given the increasing ascendancy of the British over the island from the 1700s on – many of the original non-English language names attached to Newfoundland became hybridized. The use of ‘Meadows’ in the place name, combined with a translation of the French term ‘L’Anse (meaning a small bay or cove) suggests a bucolic locality. The “meadows” reference is, in fact, a corruption of the French word *méduses* which translates, rather differently, as “jellyfish” – in reference to the marine invertebrates that fishermen observed in the vicinity, which congregate at junctions of warm and cooler currents, such as those intersecting at the northern entrance to the Strait of Belle Isle. The designation was not only incidentally descriptive; it was significant since areas of jellyfish aggregation attract whales and, therefore, whalers such as the Basque mariners who worked the waters in the 1500s-1600s.

Despite being premised on a distortion of ‘méduses’, reference to the area in terms of its “meadows” might have accorded with the perception of those Vikings who arrived in the area around 1000AD. Having traveled down from Greenland with grazing animals onboard their longboats they found fertile pasture on the Newfoundland shore. Interpreted with regard to the narrative of *Eiríks saga rauoa* (‘The Saga of the Erik the Red’), generally acknowledged to have been written in the 13<sup>th</sup> Century and preserved in two extant manuscripts<sup>3</sup>; the site appears to have been a temporary staging post for voyages further south to the area of the present-day Canadian Maritime provinces and/or the US New England states. In the general history of the island, and of the indigenous peoples who occupied it until they were decimated, displaced and/or eradicated by European visitors and settlers, the Viking incursion comprises the merest ‘blip’ on the historical radar. For the majority of Newfoundland’s period of European settlement, from the 1600s on, it was

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<sup>3</sup> The 14<sup>th</sup> Century *Hauksbók* and 15<sup>th</sup> Century *Skálholtsbók*.

also completely unknown. While there was North American interest in identifying the location of the mythical Vinland from the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century onwards (*see* Wawn, 2002), it wasn't until the 1970s that it was established that there unquestionably *was* a Viking history on the island.

The location now known as L'Anse aux Meadows (henceforth 'L'Anse') had a human history before and after the Norse visits but, despite the efforts of some archeologists and the site's interpretation centre displays to assert the significance of serial occupancy of the area; the histories of indigenous communities have paled in the spotlight that has been applied to the site's brief moment of Viking residence. In many ways the meanings and significance accruing to L'Anse derive from pre-constituted narratives that were waiting to be affixed to an appropriate archeological site. In this regard, the present day area is as much a site of crystallized discourse as one that *formed* such discourse. Following the discovery of what purported to be a 13<sup>th</sup> Century map of the North Atlantic showing areas of North America visited by the Norse in the 11<sup>th</sup> Century<sup>4</sup>, a number of archaeologists and aficionados of Viking history and literature began to actively seek North American locations that might have relics of visits to the 'Vinland' territories mentioned in the sagas. In 1961, the Norwegian enthusiast Helge Ingstad visited the township of L'Anse aux Meadows and examined landscape features identified by local resident George Decker that suggested earlier settlement (*see* Ingstad & Stine Ingstad, 2001: 122-127). He subsequently conducted excavations together with his partner Anne Stine Ingstad in 1973-76 that led them to claim the features as remnants of a Viking settlement. Subsequent excavations by Parks Canada provided further archeological evidence to support this claim and initiated the processes that led to the area's designation as a national historic site in 1978.

International recognition soon followed. In 1972, UNESCO established an international World Heritage Program that aimed to catalogue, name, and conserve sites of outstanding cultural or natural importance to the common heritage of humanity. As this characterization suggests, "importance" was deemed the principal factor. Such a term is, of course, highly contentious and the issue of judging importance is a complex and problematic one. The advantages of attaining world heritage listing are multiple. National and regional prestige and publicity are obviously particularly useful to the tourism industry. Conservation is another key element. UNESCO listing places requirements upon the national and regional authorities responsible for a listed location to maintain and conserve the sites (again, an often problematic and contested enterprise). The listings can thereby function as interventions in disputed uses of sites or else add substantial impetus to previously under-developed preservation initiatives. The first round of nominations for UNESCO World Heritage listing were processed in 1978, with Canada successfully proposing two sites, the Nahanni National Park, in the Mackenzie Mountains (a wilderness area in the Yukon) and L'Anse aux Meadows National Historic Park.

The Canadian submission on L'Anse and the report of ICOMOS (the International Council on Monuments and Sites), which assessed the applications for UNESCO, were balanced in that both emphasized the historical continuity of human use of the site, which they identify

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<sup>4</sup> See Seaver (2004) for a comprehensive critique of the map's authenticity.

as going back 5000 years, but gave most prominent status to the brief moment of the Viking settlement. As the final paragraph of ICOMOS's recommendation states:

“In spite of the unastonishing appearance of its archaeological vestiges (which were entirely covered after excavation), l'Anse aux Meadows is an outstanding property of Man's heritage. It is a precious and, up until now, unique milestone in the history of human migration and the discovery of the universe; it is the oldest settlement of European origin in America” (ICOMOS, 1978: 2-3).

There are many aspects of this assessment that merit discussion – but perhaps the reference to “discovery of the universe” is the most illuminating, referring, as it does, to the perception that the Vikings' voyage out to the Americas was somehow analogous to the NASA Apollo program initiated in 1961 (which resulted in the first human moon landing in 1969); or, perhaps more appropriately to the time of the proposal's submission, the two Viking spacecraft launched by NASA to gather information about Mars in 1975. Similar references come up in much writing about the Vikings and other early European maritime exploration – senses of voyages into the distant, alien unknown. Of course the issue here is that for the indigenous inhabitants of the area the brief Viking stay was unconnected with significant discoveries about the universe. It was more akin to a brief visitation by unwelcome foreigners, who landed, proved hostile, were engaged in combat and departed soon after.

Indeed the Vikings' welcome was notably cooler than the coordinated civic celebrations that took place in Newfoundland in July 2000 as part of the 'Vikings 1000' year, one of the highlights of which was the arrival of the replica Viking longboat *Islendingur* ('Icelander') leading a convoy of smaller replicas into L'Anse's cove. The flotilla was met by crowds and celebrated with a performance by the theatre group Spirit of Newfoundland and a concert by popular local folk-rock group The Fables. The event was widely covered in Newfoundland, Canadian and global media, and fulfilled Newfoundland Premier Brian Tobin's event launch speech, which had asserted that:

“The Vikings! 1000 year promises to be our most successful and exciting tourism season ever, for both our visitors and the residents of Newfoundland and Labrador... All the details necessary to plan a Viking vacation or sample a Viking experience are now available... This is an outstanding, province-wide event... The Vikings are here to stay” (Newfoundland Premier's Office, 2000: 1).

The latter reference referred (in substantial part) to the inauguration of Norstead, a replica Viking encampment constructed close to the archeological site. This offered a 'living history program', enacted by costumed employees performing Viking era crafts and interacting with visitors in character. This has, indeed, persisted to the present, during summer seasons at least, and the current L'Anse site combines a centralized interpretation building, retail and refreshment facility with a site trail, signage and a number of fabricated sodhouses modeled on archaeological remnants.

In an effort to identify and exploit an association with the site (and its mythologies) a number of tourist enterprises have adopted appropriately related names, logos, product and design attributes. One of the most striking of these is located in St Anthony, some 45 minutes drive north west of the site (in an area with no known Norse association). On a coastal headland just out of the town centre, the Lightkeepers Restaurant has developed an annex modeled on the restored sodhouses at the L'Anse heritage site named *Leifsbudir*<sup>5</sup>. During the summer season visitors can experience what the restaurant's website describes as a "Great Viking Feast" comprising a banquet of iconic settlement-era Newfoundland dishes (such as Jiggs dinner<sup>6</sup>), served, compeered and accompanied by staff in Viking costumes (*e.g.* Fishing Point, 2005).

The conflation of Viking themes and quintessential Newfoundland cuisine suggests an association between Viking spirit and history, heavily premised on qualities such as rugged adventurousness and resourcefulness; one that produces a fanciful conflation of the brief moment of Viking visitation and the latter European settlement of Newfoundland and North America in general. I gained insight into this during a visit to the site in June 2007 when a middle-aged Canadian couple of apparent European ancestry asked me to take a photograph of them. When I agreed they carefully posed themselves and positioned me to take several images of the particular view they desired. A brief conversation followed. They were from rural Ontario and explained that the image was intended as: "The Christmas Card shot" (that is, the front of a custom-made Christmas Card to send to friends and family). When I asked why the particular image they sought was so significant, the male replied by sweeping his arm in an arc and informing me that, "This was where it all started".

### **Nan Sdins and Haida Culture**

The second island location nominated by the Canadian government for UNESCO World heritage listing was a very different one, located on the opposite side of the country in a location even more remote from urban centres – Nan Sdins (Ninstints) village, located on the coast of SGang Gwaii at the south eastern corner of the Haida Gwaii (Queen Charlotte) island group off the north west coast of British Columbia. Unlike the romantic international saga behind the identification and elevation of L'Anse - which was facilitated by a range of agencies - the campaign to establish Nan Sdins as a heritage site occurred as part of a hard-fought and concerted reassertion of local indigenous values.

According to most recent estimates, human habitation of Haida Gwaii commenced over 10,000 years ago<sup>7</sup>. Early contacts, oral historical accounts and archeological evidence establishes that from the mid 1500s-1800s (and perhaps earlier) the Haida were a fierce and aggressive sea-going community that dominated much of the coast of (present-day) British Columbia through raiding, trade and vassalage (in a similar manner to that which the Vikings exercised in northwestern Europe and the north Atlantic in the period between

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<sup>5</sup> 'Leif' in reference to Leif Erikson the Viking leader, *burdir* – a small Viking shelter/dwelling.

<sup>6</sup> "Dine with us on Moose Stew, Cod Casserole, Jiggs Dinner, Cod Tongues, Roast Capelin, Baked Atlantic Salmon, Roast Beef, Squid Fried Rice, Salads and Rolls." (website description)

<sup>7</sup> See Koppel (2003) for an overview of the research projects that established this dating.

the late 700s and 1100AD). First European contact was recorded in the 1770s, in the form of visits to the islands by the Spanish navigator Juan Perez and Briton James Cook. The estimated population at that time was 20,000+ spread amongst over twenty townships. Until the late 1800s Russian and, later, British/Canadian fur traders were the main contacts, trading in otter pelts. There were severe consequences to this contact. One of the first was the rapid decline of the indigenous otter population as it was over-exploited by Haida wishing to benefit from their inclusion into a new trade network. Another was even more traumatic, the major decline of the islands' human population as result of the introduction of diseases such as smallpox, with as few as 600 Haida being left alive at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. The Nan Sdins site was abandoned in the mid-1880s, as its remaining residents relocated to the main islands to aggregate with survivors of other shattered communities. As in many other Pacific North East locations, Nan Sdins's sophisticated and monumental carved cedar communal houses, mortuary columns and totems were left to slowly decay. By virtue of the site's abandonment these structures were not dismantled and/or replaced with more modern buildings as in other Haida communities, and the location now provides one of the few intact material remains of a sizeable Haida community in the islands.

While the social and cultural base of Haida life and community distribution was traumatically diminished in the late 1800s, a number of traditional cultural practices, such as wood and stone carving and metal work persisted, as both an autonomous activities and as small-scale (and initially little-recognized) commercial crafts enterprises. As writers such as Bell (1999) and Jonaitis (2005) have documented, in the 1950s a number of political and art historical/anthropological strands combined to re-appraise and valorize Haida and other West Coast First Nations' visual/material culture. This took several forms, including expeditions to various parts of Haida Gwaii to 'rescue' abandoned mortuary poles and preserve and re-present them at urban locations such as the University of British Columbia; the recognition of early-mid 20<sup>th</sup> Century craftwork through its acquisition by galleries and collectors; and the recognition and facilitation of a new generation of Haida artists. In terms of heritage sites in Haida Gwaii, the first notable enterprise was the designation of SGang Gwaii island as a Class 'A' Park by the Provincial Government of British Columbia in 1957. This move provided a notional protection for Nan Sdins from damage and/or development or resource exploitation projects, but did little else.

The 1970s and early 1980s saw two parallel phenomena, i) the ever-increasing reputation of traditional Pacific First Nations' visual-material practices and the elevation of Bill Reid (and others) into figures of major national and international importance and ii) the intensification of disputes about land rights and use on Haida Gwaii. The fundamental causes of the dispute were both the in-migration of non-indigenous Canadians, who now comprise around half of the islands' circa 5000 population, and the dynamic of the forestry industry that many off-islanders (and Haida) were employed in. The most sustained campaign began in 1974 when news of plans for logging operations in South Moresby island resulted in the first concerted attempt by Haida (and their non Haida supporters) to assert control over traditional lands by opposing the logging plan through a series of public protests and disruptions. These eventually led to the Haida Nation declaring the area a 'Haida Heritage Site' in 1985 and the eventual signing of the Gwaii Haanas Agreement in

1993 between the Haida and the Government of Canada<sup>8</sup>. The nomination of Nan Sdins for UNESCO world heritage listing took place in this context and, significantly, was premised on the intent to “guarantee optimal conditions of preservation of the village of Ninstints and its wooded environment” (ICOMOS, 1981: 2). The connection of natural forest habitat and Haida culture in this submission accords with contemporary Haida cosmologies<sup>9</sup>. As the Haida Nation website declares:

“Our culture is born of respect, and intimacy with the land and sea and the air around us. Like the forests, the roots of our people are intertwined such that the greatest troubles cannot overcome us. We owe our existence to Haida Gwaii. The living generation accepts the responsibility to ensure that our heritage is passed on to following generations”.

But there are key differences between this indigenous agenda and that of external preservationists. While the Canadian world heritage listing application colourfully referred to the manner in which Nan Sdins “composed entirely of cultural features of organic matter” was “being devoured by the environment” (Government of Canada, 1980: 6); anthropologist Gloria Cranmer Webster, former Kwakwaka'wakw curator of the U'mista Cultural Centre at Alert Bay, has posed an alternative interpretation (which accords with contemporary Haida sensibility):

“We know what conservators do or try to do; that is, preserve objects for as long as possible. But, diametrically opposed to this is the general Indian view as I know it, which is that objects are created to be used and when those objects are damaged or worn out, they are thrown away and new ones are made. This applies to everything from small masks to large totem poles. For example, many Indian people feel that once a pole has served its purpose it should be allowed to go back into the ground. I think this attitude has a lot to do with the way Indian people look at the objects. The objects themselves are not important; what matters is what the objects represent” (Cranmer Webster, 1986: 77).

In an effort to accommodate these values, those preservation measures that have been adopted at the site have affected a notable compromise between Haida sensibilities and standard conservation agendas, prioritizing ‘organic’ minimally-interventionist delaying procedures that nevertheless allow the cedar structures to decompose naturally (see Rhyne, 2000). From the early 1980s, when the Haida unilaterally sent ‘watchmen’ to the site to protect it from vandalism, pilfering and/or other damage (and to collect permit money from tourists to sustain the scheme), through to the present, when Haida interpreters operate at the site informing the carefully regulated flow of tourists about Haida history; the site has been implicated into deeper heritage, land ownership and political debates which grant it a

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<sup>8</sup> Archived online at the Parks Canada website: [www.pc.gc.ca/pn-np/bc/gwaiihaanas/plan/plan2a\\_E.asp](http://www.pc.gc.ca/pn-np/bc/gwaiihaanas/plan/plan2a_E.asp).

<sup>9</sup> These have been informed and inflected by broader claims to - and ideologies of - indigenous peoples’ holistic, eco-spiritual identification with land circulating amongst Canadian First Nations’ communities and international indigenous groups over the last two decades.

new potency, a new significance that transcends its demise as a lived settlement and returns a dignity to its gradual re-immersion into the eco-scape of Haida Gwaii.

### **Symbolism and Vulnerability**

Islands' locations – and particularly their relation to sea routes – can imbue them with significance as pivotal and/or connecting points within histories of 'discovery', exploration, population movement and/or trade. Some islands are thereby vulnerable to appropriation and elevation within external heritage agendas. I characterize this as a 'vulnerability' (rather than an opportunity or advantage) since it is the global discourses and significance that attract 'heritagization' in these formations rather the specificities of islands' internal places and indigenous histories.

Externally validated heritage listings prioritize use value within a broad transnational concept of 'heritage' rather than value to local communities. In this regard, such listings are a form of external ideological characterization and contextualization. They often interpret the material artifacts of a particular socio-cultural moment as crucial heritage elements, seeking to preserve them in their current deteriorated state as ruins that – as in Romantic European sensibility – evoke former glories through their very fragmentation and decay. Or, just as problematically, they seek to attach re-creational amenities to sites that attempt to produce approximations of what former social activities and material cultures may have resembled. Such practices are distinctly opposite to the Haida sensibility that sees the intangible heritage of symbols and iconographies as being the essence of cultural identity and material artifacts as the short-term (and replaceable) vehicles of its expression.

Haida academic Marcia Crosby has argued that much external engagement in heritage issues is premised on a "salvage ethnography... whose purpose is to construct a traditionally intact aboriginal history that existed just before contact" (2005: 112). In this she identifies that:

Telling (recording) this story is the first paradoxical act of "salvaging" (saving) the remnants of such "authentic" cultures (*ibid.*)

Such a practice is distinct from processes of recognizing, engaging with and facilitating aspects of *lived* culture in contemporary communities and locations; and of acknowledging continuity in new, adapting and homeostatic forms – in short, of acknowledging heritage as a living, dynamic entity.

In this regard, the interpretation of agendas such as UNESCO's World Heritage criteria is obviously an important factor. However it was originally dressed, L'Anse aux Meadows' identification is obviously an example of a global mythology affixing itself to a location that has no direct or significant connection to remnant indigenous societies. Nan Sdins, by contrast, drew on a group of regional initiatives in its pitch for a heritage status that was deeply connected to and expressive of indigenous culture. In the first formation we can see an island location being sanctified as a location of early Western global expansion. In the

other, we can see a memorial to the indigenous cultures decimated and demoralized by more recent globalization. The cultural heritages of both are thereby memorialized: premised on the various archeology and/or decayed materiality of communities positioned in precise points in island space and time. Heritage here is archetypically museumified *in situ*. In the case of L'Anse, it has developed as a combined educational, informative and recreational centre premised on the internal displays and publications of its central heritage site, its Norstead 'lived history' recreations and the independent tourist enterprises that have accreted to it. Nan Sdins, by contrast, remains a site in tension.

Between these positions, it is possible to identify heritage agendas of particular pertinence for island cultures whereby material artifacts that can convey historical meaning can be regarded as elements in interplay with simultaneously deep-rooted and shifting intangible cultural histories and expressive styles. The most pertinent aspect is that these also require support to continue their trajectories in times of significant social, cultural and environmental change. Newfoundland's L'Anse site is a paradigmatic example of the effacement of local island indigenous cultures in favour of a mythologized western tourist heritage commodity. Nan Sdins represents a more somber, dignified and locally determined reliquary, where tourist access and interpretation is managed by a local island society actively confronting its present and future.

## **Conclusion**

From the viewpoint of Island Studies, a field that concentrates on the specificity and significance of islands and inter-island cultures, routes and roles, Nan Sdins and L'Anse are important sites that relate to major moments in human history when lines of exploration and settlement occurred. The significance of L'Anse, as the first proven site of European (brief) settlement in North America, is well known and institutionally commemorated. Nan Sdins (and Haida Gwaii in general) are rarely viewed through a similar lens. This is particularly confounding – with regard to L'Anse's elevation – since the significant revision of histories of human settlement in the Americas that occurred in 1980s and 1990s came to identify patterns of maritime travel, progressive settlement and subsequent migration along the early Holocene era island fringe of the Pacific North West as the route through which Asian migrants populated the continent<sup>10</sup>. With archaeological finds pushing back evidence of human habitation in Haida Gwaii and similar locations to over 10,000 years, the location and human history of the region can be seen in terms of a far more epic – and ultimately successful – human enterprise than the brief Viking stay in north west Newfoundland. While this aspect was overlooked in its original heritage nomination, the present Nan Sdins site can be considered to (at very least) spatially overlap with sites of the earliest human habitation of the Americas. Haida cosmology, which

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<sup>10</sup> For much of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, the main history of North American settlement assumed movement of humans from Asia over a 'land bridge' during a period when sea levels were markedly lower due to glaciation. From this point, migration was assumed to head south through a glacier-free land corridor. But, as a loose interdisciplinary group of scientists has suggested more recently, evidence for any such central continental corridor was minimal; whereas evidence of flora and fauna and, importantly human visitation and settlement for a glacier free fringe of islands and peninsulas was overwhelming. This fundamentally reshaped the model of history and placed emphasis on these coastal stepping-stones as the route of historical migration and of the earliest settlements on North America.

includes no mythology of migration to the archipelago, also suggests a deeper and more direct connection between early North Americans and present-day Haida societies.

The UNESCO world heritage recognition of L'Anse and Nan Sdins was premised on the sites' material artifacts and the manner in which these were perceived to represent the societies that once occupied the (currently uninhabited) locales. In this regard, the crucial difference between the two is that while L'Anse represents a snapshot of a singular historical incident, Nan Sdins remains enmeshed within the intangible matrix of oral narratives, traditional beliefs, music, dance forms etc. that - together with the associated visual and design practices that are manifest in material form - comprise traditional Haida culture, or, more specifically, its modern incarnation. The marginalization of the latter aspect as a consideration in the Nan Sdins site's official heritage listing is perhaps one of the most pointed indicators of the need for a more holistic approach to heritage identification. In this regard, the principles informing UNESCO's 'Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage' adopted in Paris in October 2003 are particularly pertinent to contemporary Haida Gwaii. In terms of the arguments advanced in this article, three of the most significant statements in the Convention's preamble identify:

- “the deep-seated interdependence between the intangible cultural heritage and the tangible cultural and natural heritage”;
- “that the processes of globalization and social transformation, alongside the conditions they create for renewed dialogue among communities, also give rise, as does the phenomenon of intolerance, to grave threats of deterioration, disappearance and destruction of the intangible cultural heritage, in particular owing to a lack of resources for safeguarding such heritage”; and
- “that communities, in particular indigenous communities, groups and, in some cases, individuals, play an important role in the production, safeguarding, maintenance and re-creation of the intangible cultural heritage, thus helping to enrich cultural diversity and human creativity” (UNESCO Cultural Sector, 2003: online).

At time of writing (July 2008), proposals for the first round of Intangible Cultural Heritage listings are in process. While the UNESCO ICH register represents an important recognition and assertion of intangibility, it only represents one step towards a more holistic address to the “deep-seated interdependence” that its preamble acknowledges. The lessons of previous international heritage initiatives suggest that island activists and researchers should utilize those aspects of ICH discourse and registration processes that offer them advantages at the same time as recognizing and addressing social issues such as disenfranchisement and under-development as key to island cultures as they survive and (might yet prosper) in 21<sup>st</sup> century contexts.

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