ZIBI: A case study in thinking through heritage values

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Upon its close in June 2015, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission issued a document titled *Calls to Action* as part of its final report. This document, made public and available for online download, served to shift language almost immediately putting the onus on Canadians to change occupational processes, whether it be in health, education or cultural heritage. The release of this document, with its ease of accessibility, has already proven to be a game changer for the practice of heritage conservation.

In Section 79 under the title "Commemoration," several challenges are put forth to professionals who work within the areas of heritage. Section 79 states:

We call upon the federal government, in collaboration with Survivors, Aboriginal organizations, and the arts community, to develop a reconciliation framework for Canadian heritage and commemoration. This would include, but not be limited to:

i. Amending the Historic Sites and Monuments Act to include First Nations, Inuit, and Métis representation on the Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada and its Secretariat.

ii. Revising the policies, criteria, and practices of the National Program of Historical Commemoration to **integrate Indigenous history**, **heritage values**, **and memory practices** into Canada's national heritage and history.

iii. Developing and implementing a national heritage plan and strategy for commemorating residential school sites, the history and legacy of residential schools, and the contributions of Aboriginal peoples to Canada's history.

For this sake of this study I will focus on Article ii. The challenge was put forth specifically to the <u>National Program of Historical Commemoration</u> although this has not stopped it from being taken on at both an institutional and individual level by practitioners in the arts and cultural heritage. Here, as we can see, it has been proposed that "indigenous history, heritage values and memory practices" be considered with regards to integration with "Canada's national heritage and history." Focusing even further on the term "heritage values" how are these defined when the framework is Indigenous? What are the ways we can understand heritage values as articulated from such a perspective(s)? And how might these values be integrated into the practice of heritage conservation?

As a way to provide some bearing I provide this quote from *Protecting Indigenous Knowledge and Heritage: A Global Perspective*, a book by Mi'kmaq authour and educator Marie Battiste and Chickasaw / Cheyenne educator and fellow advisor to UNESCO James (Sa'kej) Youngblood Henderson.

For Indigenous peoples, heritage is a **bundle of relationships**, rather than a bundle of economic rights or policy considerations. The **"object" has no meaning outside the relationship**, whether it is a physical object such as a sacred site or a ceremonial tool, or intangible such as a song or a story. (p. 71)

These words summarize my understanding of Indigenous heritage values as based on my own experience working on Indigenous led projects dealing with cultural heritage. The value of relationships, to other people and to animals as kin as well as a human's interconnection to natural and social systems, is central to Indigenous ways of knowing and being in the world. In connection to this, reciprocity is also an important value as it provides the mechanism by which those relationships are acknowledged and re-negotiated.

In this paper, I propose to investigate both the conflicting as well as the overlapping values that people in urban centres as professionals as well as citizens bring to the practice of heritage conservation. As a way to explore the conflicts and the overlaps the site of Chaudière Falls in Ottawa and the controversy surrounding the Windmill redevelopment project will be analyzed. This contested site is one that demonstrates many of the contemporary themes heritage conservation, on both a national and international scale, is trying to unpack, one of which is the question of 'values.' The Windmill project, *Zibi* (named after the Algonquin word for river), a 'green' condo complex, has involved government at the municipal, provincial and federal levels as well as other governing bodies, like the National Capital Commission (NCC) here in Ottawa, a Crown corporation whose mandate is to ensure "that Canada's Capital is a dynamic and inspiring source of pride for all Canadians, and a legacy for generations to come." (NCC, 2017)

Professionals working on the heritage implications of this site, located within jurisdictional designation in both Ottawa and Gatineau, may be mindful of implementing the concept of 'Reconciliation' as a value. Other 'Canadian' values of environment and sustainable development may at first seem compatible with Indigenous values of respect for the land and the value of considering the impact of today's actions on future generations. When positioned in contrast to values of sovereignty, land reclamation and the veneration of sites of sacred

importance the negotiation of values becomes more complex. For this reason, the site of Chaudière Falls provides a powerful case study to illustrate the practice of heritage conservation in Canada at this historical moment of Reconciliation.

I entered into the dispute around Windmill early on, in part as a journalist but also as a citizen who had moved, less than a year prior, to a city built on land that was unceded by the Algonquin. At the end of September 2014 a call was put out on Facebook to come and show support for the sacred site of Chaudière Falls and the surrounding Islands of Chaudière, Albert and Victoria, also locally known by its Algonquin name of *Asinabka*. There was to be a Council meeting on October 2 at the Ottawa City Hall regarding the rezoning of the former location of the Domtar paper company situated next to the Falls. The meeting was to address a request for the zoning bylaw to be amended to mixed-zoning. (IPSMO, 2014)

Due the impact of paper production as well as decades of lumber mills on the site much of the area was now considered a brownfield in need of environmental remediation. If Council put through the zoning application then it would allow for Windmill, who had signed an agreement to purchase the Ottawa and Gatineau lands from Domtar in December of 2013, to proceed with development. (Brown, 2013)

On that crisp and bright autumn day, I showed up at City Hall to encounter a diverse group of people. The vast majority voiced their concern proclaiming that they were *not* in support of the rezoning of the Domtar site to mixed residential and commercial zoning, in effect allowing Windmill to break ground. This concerned group of citizens gathered both Indigenous and non-Indigenous supporters. In the seats of Council chambers, I sat alongside young university students from Carleton's School of Architecture, environmentalists, retirees, business owners, artists, social justice activists, as well as Algonquin elders. There were people there that had worked with Nelson Mandela, people who had worked on UNESCO projects, people who had been pro Windmill but after hearing the position of the Indigenous architect of the Museum of History, Douglas Cardinal, had changed their mind. As together we listened to the pitch presented by Windmill, I cannot deny that I did not see value in their proposal. Their goal for the development was to be the "world's most sustainable community." They would be "openly collaborative" and allow "First Nations access to the Falls." It was evident from our words to City Council that those of us who showed up in opposition to Windmill shared these same values

around sustainability, collaboration and recognition for the Indigenous significance of the site.

So what then was the conflict? To comprehend the complexity I will provide some background to give context then circle back again to this question of values.

Prior to the arrival of Samuel de Champlain in the 1600s what is now the Ottawa River and surrounding waterways were a meeting place for various First Nations. The islands and land along the falls were both a centre for trade and a place for sacred ceremony. It was already a "multicultural hub," as architect Douglas Cardinal has referred to it, with the Falls called *Akikodjiwan* by the Algonquin. Due to its importance, he has also referred to it as "our Mecca."

By the 1800s the area became important as a way to transport lumber from the surrounding forests downriver. The area around Chaudière Falls then became a hub for industry, gathering to the area labourers who built their homes on what became known as LeBreton Flats, a working class neighbourhood the was expropriated by the NCC in the 1960s to create space for what was to be the location of the DND, the Government's Department of National Defence. At that time, a conflict of values over heritage conservation and sense of place would have been witnessed - the NCC privileged the needs of government over the needs of a low-income neighbourhood and their history as a community. In the end, after being razed, the land lay vacant for another 40 years. (Deachman, 2016)

Another bit of important history is that of the actual Falls. It is said that the Falls once rivalled Niagara as a destination, a "boiling kettle" or *Asticou*. In the time before and after the arrival of Champlain, as mentioned, the Falls were a site for ceremony. In 1908 the flow of the Falls was dammed for hydroelectric power with no public access to the Falls since that time, that is until now. (Payne, 2015) Although Windmill does not own the area that is the Falls, it owns land that leads to the Falls. As part of their development strategy, they have promoted that this area will be left accessible. (Windmill, 2016)

The final bit of history that speaks to the importance of the site is the vision of William Commanda, a local Algonquin elder from Kitigan Zibi Anishinabeg First Nation, a reserve located a two hour drive away from Ottawa, across the river in Québec by the town of Maniwaki. Grandfather Commanda, as he was called, believed that the islands by Chaudière Falls should

be given back to the Algonquin and a "centre for peace," open to all people, from all nations, be established. As Cardinal describes it, he had a 30 year working relationship with Grandfather Commanda, who tasked him with the charge of building this Centre for Peace. (Pearson, 2014) The NCC, was also on board and supported the vision. According to many, and also according the those who arrived that day to oppose the rezoning, the NCC along with the City of Ottawa were reneging on their commitment to Grandfather Commanda's vision. (CBC, 2011)

The message that many of those in opposition were trying to convey was that if Windmill was allowed to proceed, a tear in that relationship between stakeholders would occur. The "bundle of relationships" that comes with the the acknowledgement of the site as of heritage value to Indigenous people, and unceded by the Algonquin, was in threat of being superseded by a different set of values.

As many Council Members spoke, they recalled their memories of meeting Grandfather Commanda and the impact he had on each of them. He was "an internationally recognized Algonguin elder, spiritual leader and promoter of environmental sustainability" who has been referred to as "Canada's Nelson Mandela." (Payne, 2015) It was evident Grandfather Commanda had left an indelible mark on the City of Ottawa, particularly at a personal level of human interaction with its citizens. And yet, as one councillor said, "Our hands are tied." The price tag associated with cleaning up the brownfield, that was the Domtar site, was a cost neither the City, nor the NCC could afford. With their backs against the wall, they were having to make the choice that would allow a developer to pick up the tab for environmental remediation but at least, the councillor rationalized, "They are a good developer, a green developer." With little choices left, they were privileging another set of heritage values, values that would relay a different type of story ultimately producing another type of cultural legacy. Ultimately it came down to money and who had it. It was clear, in spite of the overwhelming Council and citizen support for both Algonguin control of the site and the vision of William Commanda, the City would be voting in favour of Windmill. It was also clear that the developers already knew they had won.

My own plea to Council was to value the Chaudière Falls site beyond its monetary merit, for its Indigenous as well as its environmental significance as an area where now endangered eels were once bountiful, an important food source for the Algonquin. They would swim up the falls,

part of a unique ecosystem that had been in place for thousands of years. As I walked to the microphone to address the Councillors, I offered my proposal:

As a sacred location with important environmental significance there is possibility of applying for the Chaudière Site to be added to the World Heritage Site list. This would certainly be an incredible opportunity to designate this space in Ottawa as a UNESCO site.

I continued that, in my opinion:

it is important to keep the islands of Chaudière, Albert and Asinabka together, as a whole and to be a space that is recognized as sacred and saved from other types of development.

I ended by stating that I felt strongly about the fact that other types of development would "drastically shift the meaning."

Although I did not realize it at the time, myself as well as the others who came in support of the Indigenous prioritization of the land, were speaking to the concept of "spirit of place" as defined in the *Québec Declaration On The Preservation Of The Spirit Of Place*. This document was drafted in October of 2008 on "the occasion of the 16th General Assembly of ICOMOS" held in Québec City while the province was busy "marking the 400th anniversary of the founding of Québec." (UNESCO, 2008) The importance of tangible and intangible heritage was brought into the discussion on values broadening the scope as to what constitutes heritage. The Declaration even contained a seed of consideration around the "relational" way "spirit of place" operates when multiple meanings are layered onto a site.

Spirit of place is defined as the tangible (buildings, sites, landscapes, routes, objects) and the intangible elements (memories, narratives, written documents, rituals, festivals, traditional knowledge, values, textures, colors, odors, etc.), that is to say the physical and the spiritual elements that give meaning, value, emotion and mystery to place...Considered as a **relational concept**, spirit of place takes on a plural and dynamic character, capable of possessing multiple meanings and singularities, of changing through time, and of belonging to different groups. (p. 2)

Despite the diversity of those who spoke, a collective vision was upheld, one in which the Nation to Nation relationship and obligations as citizens living uninvited on unceded land, was placed at the centre. This vision, reconciled the tangible and intangible, the physical and spiritual. The

vision also spoke to a contemporary heritage scenario that could be enriched by the Indigenous meaning(s) layered onto the site.

Although we can see that a deeper understanding of place was expressed in the *Québec Declaration On The Preservation Of The Spirit Of Place*, the *Burra Charter*, drafted in 1979, was the first charter, on the subject of heritage conservation, that started to take into account Indigenous perspectives on place. Heritage projects in Australia were having to reckon with settler heritage values coming up against Indigenous heritage values. (Lesh, 2017) The result was writing into the Charter a 'new' set of values to consider around international heritage projects. The *Burra Charter* built upon previous heritage values as expressed in the *Venice Charter* and other commissions expanding the values from aesthetic, historic, and scientific to include social and spiritual. (ICOMOS China, 2014) Although the original charter was not explicit about Indigenous perspectives, in later revisions we begin to see a more articulated meaning of Indigenous heritage values. In the most recent iteration, drafted in 2013, "use" of site includes "cultural practices commonly associated with Indigenous people such as ceremonies, hunting and fishing and fulfillment of traditional obligations" and it goes on to include "exercising a **right of access**." (Australia ICOMOS, 2013, 2)

As outlined in *Understanding the Burra Charter,* a 1996 brochure created by Australia ICOMOS, with regards to sites of cultural heritage the following should be considered as well as prioritized:

- interpret and present the place in a way appropriate to its significance
- understand the place and its cultural significance, including its meaning to people, before making decisions about its future
- involve the communities associated with the place
- care for its cultural significance and other significant attributes, taking account of all aspects of significance

as well as:

• interpret and present the place in a way appropriate to its significance. (South Australia, 2017)

Upon looking at Windmill's branding for Zibi (<u>www.zibi.ca</u> and <u>www.zibidialogue.ca</u>), one could argue that Windmill incorporated the values as expressed in both the *Burra Charter* and the

Québec Declaration into their development plan. That day at City Hall, after the Council meeting closed, the more extroverted of the two brothers who founded Windmill proceeded to approach people, who hours before, were protesting against his company's development plans. I watched as he walked from person to person, smiling then resting his hands comfortably on shoulders as he leaned in close to speak. I heard him declare that he had listened to what was being said and wanted to incorporate Grandfather Commanda's vision into the Windmill project as well as work with and acknowledge the Algonquin (although it should be noted that there was no mention of giving back the land). Several months later, in February of 2015, the name of the development project was announced with the hashtag #ZIBIISHERE signalling its arrival. (Windmill, 2015)

On Zibi's main website under the Project page, in the sub-category "Vision and Plan," one can scroll down to read the following:

Windmill Development Group recognizes that the entire Ottawa Valley, and much of Eastern Ontario, is on unceded Algonquin territory. Zibi, the Anishinabe word for River, was chosen for this new redeveloped community to honour the river and the Algonquin-Anishinabe people.

On <u>www.zibidialogue.ca</u>, the website designed specifically to address the Indigenous heritage of the site, under the page "Land & Spirit," Grandfather Commanda is quoted. The web copy then goes on to explain the various views of what is sacred to the Anishinaabe and how Windmill, as developers, are not in violation of those views:

Remembering that Zibi does not include Victoria Island, and with great respect to all opinions and voices, there is no Anishinabe consensus as to the sacredness of the wider Chaudière Falls area, nor of the land where Zibi will be located.

A few months after the announcement of the project name, their marketing campaign was rolled out and posters, displayed in bus shelters, hit the streets of Ottawa, mere weeks after the final gathering of the TRC. The posters, designed with eye-catching orange on the top and compelling renderings of the future development on the bottom, used the tag "Zibi is...

...better.

...green.

...Reconciliation."

Windmill peppered their promotion with the 'buzzword du jour' but had they worked the value of Reconciliation into the processes by which their relationship with the Algonquin was established then maintained?

On May 7, 2015 I attended a day long Information Session. The event, "hosted" by a group called The Memengweshii Council, was held at the Zibi location in one of the derelict Domtar buildings. The digital e-vite communicated their support for Windmill along with the fact that due to Windmill's commitment to Indigenous heritage the Zibi development would "bring to life Anishinaabe culture in downtown Ottawa-Gatineau for the first time since colonization." (Algonguin Nation, 2015) As I came to understand, the council members were selected by Windmill in order to have a "non-political advisory group of Anishinaabe women who believe in a future in sustainability, empowerment, and opportunity." (It should be noted that prior to the City Council's decision on the rezoning, Windmill had already sent out an employment posting for Indigenous cultural laissons) Their role was to provide Windmill with Indigenous perspectives on the importance of the site and give council with regards to what is culturally appropriate from an Anishinaabeg perspective. In their introduction reiterating their support for Windmill's prioritization of Reconciliation they also expressed their frustration at being ostracized by both Algonquin community members on various neighbouring reserves as well as the urban Indigenous community in Ottawa. The presentation began with each woman testifying as to the reasons why they should be considered experts in Indigenous knowledge. Next tears, along with accusations of lateral violence, became part of the presentation. Then the "Information Session" digressed into finger pointing at those who criticized Windmill. After a break for lunch, the mood thankfully changed as others associated and in partnership with the project came to the front. One of the speakers was the founder of Bioregional North America. He proclaimed that along with executing best practice with regards to environmental sustainability Windmill also had plans to implement best practice regarding cultural sustainability, and to establish themselves as leaders in this area. As I understood it, their documentation around best practice in environmental sustainability would be made public. I posed the question to him about whether, in support of fostering Reconciliation, they had plans to produce and make public a best practice document around processes for culturally sustainability? I was told they had spent

so much money in the consultation process that they no longer had the funds to proceed with this type of project. I left the event wondering what the intent of the day was. From the meltdown I observed, it seemed that Windmill was exploiting the weakest links in order to spin a tale of consent to the media.

If one Googles "Zibi," beyond the top rankings pointing the user to the main Zibi website and articles about Algonquin support (impressive SEO) one finds headlines that problematize Zibi's assertion of best practice around cultural sustainability. Another story is revealed.

Ottawa Zibi development stirs controversy over green labels, First Nations rights (National Observer, September 1, 2016)

Land rights, city-building at odds in Ottawa's Zibi development (<u>The Globe & Mail</u>, January 8, 2016)

Algonquin Grandmothers File Claim Over Proposed 'Zibi' Condo (<u>The Huffington Post</u>, April 4, 2017).

The conflict many had and continue to have with Windmill was that the process by which Zibi claimed they gained consent was suspect. Few Algonquin supported the project and holes in their PR continued to be exposed. Through the appropriation of Indigenous heritage in their marketing they obfuscated the opposing voices - Indigenous and non-Indigenous. Without background knowledge of this, the average citizen, upon visiting their websites might be confused as to why they were being opposed. The online optics promoted a commitment to their relationship with the Algonquin. Guerilla activism tactics on the bus shelter posters said otherwise.

"Zibi is...

...on stolen land."

As I sat on a folding chair inside a damp industrial building for the *Memengweshii Council* event the tears, accusations, and lazy responses from people in leadership positions didn't support

^{...}greed.

^{...}colonialism.

the 'truth' of the web copy. As Cree lawyer Sharon Venne writes in her essay *Treaties in Good Faith* "lies written on paper are not true for anyone." (DePasquale, 7) Neither are lies coded in HTML.

I circle back now to question of Indigenous heritage values. What can we know from considering that the object or site "*has no meaning outside the relationship?*" And what does Reconciliation look like when integrated within the practice of heritage? Does it look like condo complexes given Indigenous names as way to "honour?" Does it look like the 'branding' of consent when the majority of Indigenous people 'consulted' were not in favour? Does it implement the colonial strategy of "Divide and Rule" as a way to undermine solidarity and sovereignty? Does it create alliances solely tied to economics? The framework of capitalism requires that land produce a profit measured by monetary metrics. Relationships, as well as the ecologies and systems that exist outside those metrics, become secondary. In this framework, even the value of Reconciliation is at risk. The concept becomes a cultural commodity, a means to serve a profitable end. When land along with people's relationship to that land and each other is valued only in so much as it can be commodified, relationships start to severe as alliances formed when it is convenient are then broken when it is not. If profit is the driver, the bundle becomes compromised.

In order to privilege the bundle of relationships as the central value by which the health and success of all else is measured, the process of consultation must change to a process of relationship building **prior to agendas being set**. This type of process is slower. It takes time. It does not fit into city planning agendas that seek to rapidly fill 'unproductive' spaces, ones that defy being quantified by monetary metrics.

Christina Cameron, formerly the Chairperson of the World Heritage Committee, proposes:

There are many questions to ask when we examine Canada's historic places: What do they tell us about who we are? What kinds of spaces have we created for ourselves? Which ones have we valued and preserved? How have emerging groups within our society expressed themselves through place? How do we share our understanding of the physical spaces that constitute our memory and experience?

Through the investigation of the site of Chaudière Falls, the reactions and responses of the citizens of Ottawa in opposition to Windmill tell us a lot about where we are at in this moment of

Reconciliation. There is something here to work with - a respect and understanding for what the *Québec Declaration* has called the spirit of place. I end by coming back to the TRC's *Calls to Action* "to integrate Indigenous history, heritage values, and memory practices into Canada's national heritage and history" and propose a challenge - in assessing Windmill's best practice approach to cultural sustainability there are valuable lessons.

Let's learn from them.

I didn't describe what is meant by "bundle." As I have come to understand it a bundle can be physical or metaphorical, regardless of the form, a bundle is meant to represent all the elements that go into right relationships around an event, a project, and/or a commitment.

Although I consciously stayed away from Settler Colonialism as a theoretical framework from which to interpret the actions of Windmill I came across a concept that was interesting - municipal colonialism - as articulated by Jordan Stanger-Ross - <u>http://www.utpjournals.press/doi/pdf/10.3138/chr.89.4.541</u>

Another aspect I edited out but that I felt offered some insight was the absence of Indigenous perspectives in urban planning as articulated in the research of Carleton professor Heather Dorries research -

https://tspace.library.utoronto.ca/bitstream/1807/65468/1/Dorries_Heather_J_201206_PhD_thes is.pdf &

http://policyoptions.irpp.org/magazines/september-2017/beyond-the-indian-act-in-urban-canada/

I edited out the information on the Miwate project but I would have liked to have kept it in as it speaks to the same process of commodifying reconciliation into a cultural product. Although I am sure a lot of people say this project as respectful as I clicked through the website and watched the videos it was incredibly problematic. I include it here:

In 1908 the flow of the Falls was dammed for hydroelectric power with no public access to the Falls since that time, that is until now. This past October, sections of the Falls were opened to the public and a light show titled Miwàte, meaning "dazzle by light" in Algonquin, illuminated the Falls nightly until November 5. The light show was one of the local events marking Ottawa's Canada 150 celebrations and came with a price tag of \$700,000. The show included a accompanying soundscape of "original music, including drumming, melodic chanting, flutes and the whispers of aboriginal youths reciting in Anishinaabe, the language of the Algonquin people" and was a "tribute to indigenous people."

In the Ottawa Citizen, Guy Laflamme, the man behind the City of Ottawa's 2017 plan, called the production a "spiritual experience" and was quoted as saying:

We want to create this communion between the falls and the spectators, and get people to better appreciate and understand why this is considered a sacred site for Indigenous people.

The production was in collaboration with the Algonquins of Pikwakanagan First Nation, one of the few local reserves in support of the Zibi project. A promotional video on the Miwate website shows a group of Indigenous youth arriving in Ottawa. The purpose, as communicated by the

organizers, was to allow the 34 young people from Thunder Bay the opportunity "to explore the Capital Region, rediscover a sacred land and draw pride, strength and inspiration from its water." As the video follows the youth on their visit the focus is on shots of them at some of the National Capital Region's iconic sites - Parliament Hill, the Museum of Civilization and of course Chaudière Falls electrically lit up in the darkness of an autumn night. Spliced in between are shots of smiling youth trying on tees and selecting Ottawa 2017 'merch.'

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