

Editorial

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Cultural heritage is not only about artifacts, monuments, landscapes, and traditions from the past but also, and perhaps even more so, about people living in the present and in the future. Therefore, heritage management and conservation must always be informed by the question of what we want the heritage “to do” in society—and, indeed, to society—in order to benefit the needs of specified groups of people in present and future generations.¹ No strategy is ever innocent; none is inherently preferable over any other.

Heated debates about the best ways to manage heritage and conservation have been held for more than a century.² In many ways, these debates are a significant social practice in their own right, and, through them, heritage management has created its own heritage.³ This long tradition of engagement and discussion has resulted in some important lessons for all of us. Most importantly, when we manage specific heritage and determine strategies and practices of conservation, we are really managing ideas about the relations between past, present, and future societies. These thoughts help us negotiate, and engage with, the many ways of how human societies were, are, and can be lived under different circumstances. It is therefore never advisable to separate practices from theory—both are dependent on each other. The best decisions for the various practices around heritage and conservation are the most thoughtful decisions, informed by the best thinking of a range of people with relevant expertise and experience.

One issue of particular significance is the most appropriate response to cultural heritage that has been destroyed. A balance is needed between, on the one hand, the appreciation of specific roles of heritage that can be reinstated through careful

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¹Loulanski 2006; Holtorf and Högberg, *forthcoming*.

²Schmidt 2008; Harrison 2013.

³Holtorf 2012.

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rehabilitation and, on the other hand, the acceptance of the unique properties that have been lost. Full-scale reconstructions of previously existing structures might be helpful in some cases, as can be the absences left by heritage or newly created structures or practices as well as anything in-between these extremes. Destruction and reconstruction are equally about the past that was and the future that is to be. Both concurrently manifest continuities and discontinuities in the present, involving loss and gain, while negotiating values and meanings connected with the end of past certainties and the uncertainties of new beginnings. Therefore, both destruction and reconstruction are in different ways maintaining authenticity and credibility in various contexts and for various audiences.⁴

Today, these issues are back on the top of the agenda of what has been called critical heritage studies. They reemerged as questions in urgent need of further debate, not the least in the aftermath of natural disasters or human conflicts resulting in destructions of cultural heritage, such as the recent military conflicts in Syria. Can, and, indeed, should, destruction be undone? Does the reconstruction of cultural heritage, supposedly by some default, always lie in the best interests of the local population? How can heritage best contribute to future making? What is the relationship between the values of a given heritage and the circumstances of its creation or re-creation?

The 2014 Nara +20 document on heritage practices, cultural values, and the concept of authenticity recognizes that “cultural heritage undergoes a continuous process of evolution” and that any assessments of heritage values need to “accommodate changes over time in perceptions and attitudes.”⁵ The document acknowledges that “the concept of cultural heritage itself assumes diverse forms and processes.” It recommends further work “on methodologies for assessing this broader spectrum of cultural forms and processes, and the dynamic interrelationship between tangible and intangible heritage.” The articles in this issue on authenticity and reconstruction contribute to this ambition, combining current thinking in different disciplines (psychology, architecture, urban planning, historic preservation, and archaeology) with practical examples from around the world. This issue complements recent work initiated by Toshiyuki Kono of the International Council of Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS) that forms part of the ICOMOS Recovery and Reconstruction Project.⁶ To date, this project has led to the publication of a guidance document on post-trauma recovery and reconstruction for world heritage cultural properties and a systematic collection of relevant global case studies based on common parameters.⁷

The articles in this issue derive from the pilot workshop of the ICOMOS University Forum, titled *A Contemporary Provocation: Reconstructions as Tools of Future-making*. Held on 13–15 March 2017 at ICOMOS’s international headquarters in Paris, France, the workshop was co-organized by Cornelius Holtorf

⁴Nerdinger 2010; Holtorf 2015.

⁵Nara+20 2015.

⁶ICOMOS, n.d.

⁷ICOMOS 2017.

(Linnaeus University, Sweden), Loughlin Kealy (University College Dublin, Ireland), Toshiyuki Kono (ICOMOS/Kyushu University, Japan), and Marie-Laure Lavenir (ICOMOS, France). As an event of the ICOMOS University Forum, its aim was to stimulate dialogue between professional heritage consultants and academic heritage experts.

The workshop was run as an intensive, exploratory experience in which the participants engaged in open discussion in a multidisciplinary environment. The participants had been selected on the basis of extended abstracts submitted in advance. During the workshop, the participants were assigned to one of the themes and actively contributed to the discussion within their group. However, for one session, the participants changed their focus to one of the other themes and thus were able to provide feedback on different ideas to their original group. There were also a number of plenary sessions. The workshop was documented on the ICOMOS webpages, which even features full versions of a selection of papers that had been finalized by a number of participants after the workshop and revised after they were peer reviewed by the co-organizers.⁸ An external summary and review of the workshop was published by Tim Winter.⁹ Before they were submitted to this issue, all contributions were thoroughly rewritten and considerably extended. The peer review process was managed by Cornelius Holtorf, except concerning his own article for which the peer review was managed by Alex Bauer.

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⁸ICOMOS 2018.

⁹Winter 2017.

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