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Conservation theory in the twenty-first century: slow evolution or a paradigm shift?

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ABSTRACT

The prevailing philosophies and world view of nineteenth-century Europe, the Arts and Crafts Movement, the writings of William Morris and John Ruskin, amongst others, came to define a conservation movement that shaped conservation practices in years to come. These philosophies, influenced by romanticism and rationalism also underpin what became known as modern conservation in the twentieth century and are embedded in numerous international charters and conventions, including the World Heritage Convention. In the twenty-first century heritage conservation has become a truly global concern, as heritage is commercialised like never before and threatened like never before. This article questions whether the established theories of conservation are still relevant to an expanding remit and changing demands of building conservation in the global context of the twenty-first century. It argues that established conservation principles and the tools that support them are woefully ill-equipped to respond to rapidly shifting attitudes globally and the management structures that have emerged out of neo-liberal outlooks.

KEYWORDS

conservation theory;
authenticity;
commodification of heritage;
globalisation; reconstruction

Introduction

The protection, safeguarding and stewardship of the historic environment has not only established a global operational reach but the field itself has significantly broadened. The rise in popularity of World Heritage status worldwide, owes as much to the global commodification of cultural assets as it does to a growing awareness of heritage values. From its early beginnings in the nineteenth century and doctrinal establishment and consolidation in the second half of the twentieth century, conservation is anything but an established discipline. The collective forces of globalisation, post-modernist world view and consumerism, played out alongside a strong need to establish and portray distinctiveness and identity, influence what built heritage is safeguarded, how it is protected and notions of authenticity. On a global scale there are discernible shifts in conservation practice which ultimately bring into question the relevance of its much lauded philosophies in the current era.

Over a 50-year period the scope of conservation has widened considerably from the 'sites, monuments and ensembles' remit of the 1964 Venice Charter to encompass

everything from cultural landscapes to industrial heritage and twentieth-century architecture. This on its own places pressure on how a collectively accepted ‘conservation theory’ can be adapted to remain relevant to the demands and peculiarities of this new ‘broad’ church. Furthermore, the combined influences of neo-liberal economic practices, globalisation and commercialisation have repositioned cultural heritage as a tradeable commodity and a consumable experience.

At a more nuanced level the now widely recognised values-based approaches to conservation, the incorporation of material values (tangible) and values of meaning (intangible) into the conservation and heritage management process, combined with the material science requirements of the conservation of modern materials and technologies generates even more differing perspectives on the notion of authenticity. The adequacy of the theories – largely of nineteenth century post-Enlightenment European origin – and the tools – doctrines based on these theories, developed in a modernist construct and intended for a smaller pool of typologies of heritage – to guide conservation in the twenty-first century therefore need to be questioned.

Within this context, these philosophies are analysed from a historical perspective to establish the ways in which contemporary architectural, societal and economic influences have altered, shaped and at times obliterated established conservation theories. In doing so, the article questions the adequacy of the well-established doctrines to respond to the challenges of conservation today.

An historical perspective: modernism and conservation in the twentieth century

The histories of conservation tend to focus on the philosophy¹ or policy² rather than the scientific or design aspects of conservation. Although the nineteenth century practices of conservation and architectural theory are intrinsically linked and studied, the study of the conservation movement from the twentieth century has often been set apart from the contemporary architectural theories that were shaping the built environment of the mid to late twentieth century. There has been an implicit assumption that they occupy two parallel domains and conservationist and protectionist approaches are often portrayed as opposing prevalent modernist architectural design and urbanism practices.

The long history and early beginnings of conservation, the care, maintenance and reuse of monuments has been well documented.³ Growing access to ancient monuments in the eighteenth century, especially through the Grand Tour popularised the practice of collecting antiquities but also led to a greater understanding of medieval monuments in Britain, and subsequently their protection. Over the course of the nineteenth century romantic classicism gave way to national romanticism and ideas on antiquarianism⁴ and the picturesque movement.⁵ Modern conservation is usually credited with evolving from these late nineteenth century attitudes to history, not only romanticism but also rationalism and positivism. Alongside scientific endeavours, positivism, realism and rationalism had been introduced into art in the post-Enlightenment. In the tradition of the humanities following sciences this was the natural following on of rationalism and its influence on the protection of historic artefacts.

This generated in the positivist and rational view a ‘scientific’ approach that also advocated material honesty. John Ruskin’s romantic views of ruins and the patina of age, were

combined with recommendations for minimal intervention and the notion of trusteeship – that heritage is passed down through generations.⁶ Some have argued that this preservationist paradigm of heritage is only concerned with the physical and material relics of the past⁷ and as a material fetishism built on a belief in scientific knowledge.⁸ The principle adopted in the mid-nineteenth century by Adolphe Napoleon Didron that ‘it is better to repair than to restore, better to restore than to rebuild, better to rebuild than to embellish; in no case must anything be added and, above all, nothing should be removed’⁹ also became a founding principle for the Society for the Protection of Ancient Monuments (SPAB) and is stated by William Morris in its 1877 manifesto:

... stave off decay by daily care, to prop a perilous wall or mend a leaky roof by such means as are obviously meant for support or covering, and show no pretence of other art, and otherwise to resist all tampering with either the fabric or ornament of the building as it stands.¹⁰

From these standpoints developed a conservation philosophy of minimal intervention and ‘honest repairs’ that were clearly legible and discernible from the original historic fabric (Figure 1).

The key theories of twentieth century conservation, of working with evidence, minimal intervention, tradition over technology, legibility and respect for the patina of age can be clearly linked to nineteenth-century European approaches to science, art and history.¹¹ They also related to architectural practices of the time. Charles Voysey, a contemporary of Morris and a modernist for example was also seeking ‘honesty’ and ‘simplicity’ in his design approaches.¹² Both Arts and Crafts interest in the vernacular and the traditional

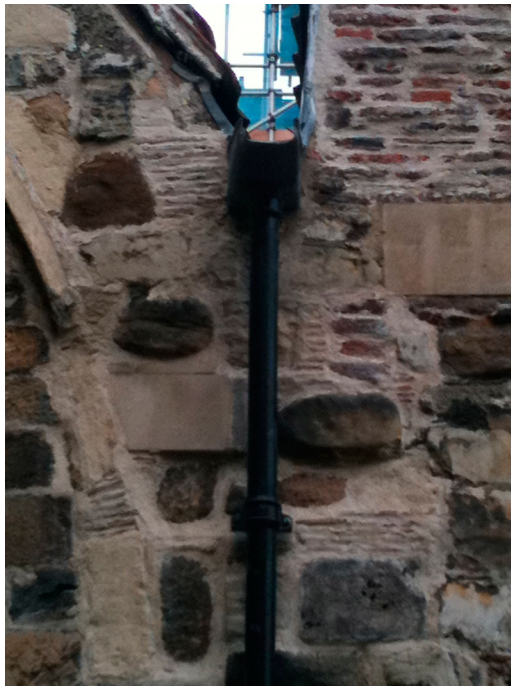


Figure 1. The minimal intervention approach advocated in the SPAB Manifesto and the legibility of interventions is still practiced in conservation, Holy Trinity Church, York, England.

and Gilbert Scott's historicist approaches find their origins in the same philosophical engagement with the past.

The narrative of a conservation movement emerging as a reaction to the modern movement (loss of heritage in the name of development and the dominance of the motor car in the planning of cities) in the second half of the twentieth century is widely upheld and repeated. While modernism's anti-historicist stance on the 'conviction that the untried is markedly superior to the familiar',¹³ may have placed it at odds with the burgeoning conservation movement, the modernist attitude of separating the past and the present and the honesty of material and form in the case of new designs was also being reflected in conservation.¹⁴

In this age of science and ideology as various architectural movements set out their manifestos so too did the conservationists. The Athens Charter for the Restoration of Historic Monuments of 1931 was conceived in the modernist spirit closely echoing the modernist architects embracing the potential of new materials and technological inventions.¹⁵ The language of the 1964 Venice Charter by comparison is more cautious, but also introduces the idea of the conservation professional making balanced judgements.¹⁶ At the same time the two world wars that shook Europe also influenced the ways in which cultural heritage was valued. Both the targeting and later reconstruction of heritage established the strong connection between heritage and national identity, and made practices that were at times at odds with contemporary conservation doctrine permissible (Figure 2).

What is conceptualised at the end of this period in what Jokilehto refers to as modern conservation and Muñoz Viñas as classical conservation is that integrity is seen as being physical, aesthetic and historical.¹⁷ The scientific approach of the previous century is

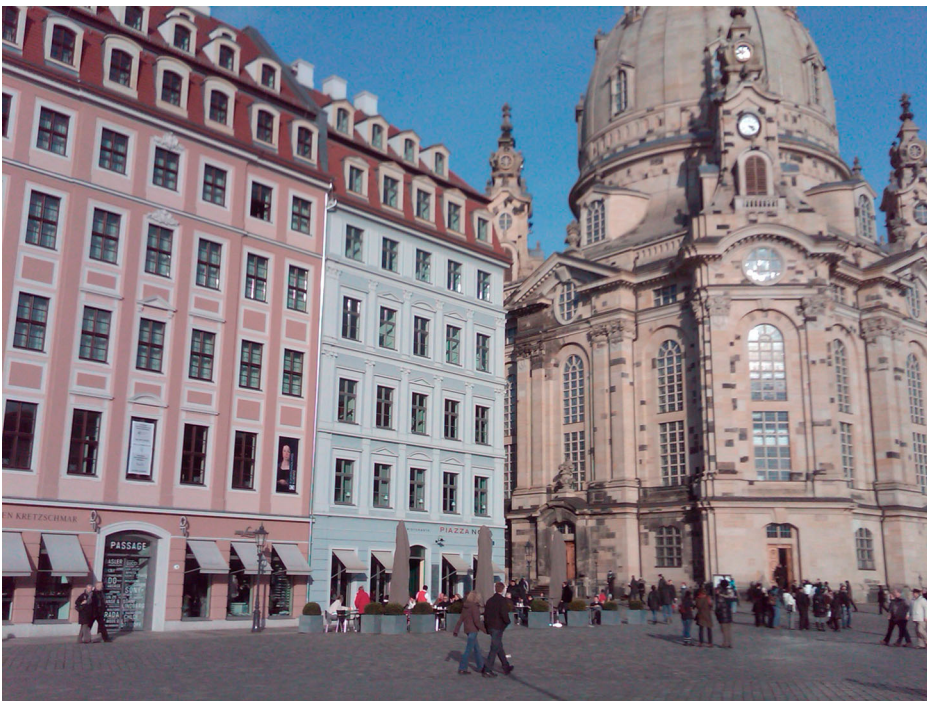


Figure 2. The delayed post-war reconstruction of the historic centre of Dresden in Germany at the turn of the millennium coincided with a growing appetite for heritage reconstruction globally.

upheld and materials research forms and important component in the development of conservation centres and institutes. At its founding in 1965 the International Council of Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS) is characterised by five scientific committees dedicated to the various material sciences, structures and recording.

By the end of the twentieth century, however, conservation had clearly evolved in two separate strands: conservation as an approach and conservation as a science. Reflecting these trends, ICOMOS scientific committees now encompassed both a broader remit (e.g. historic landscapes, vernacular architecture) and less tangible and more operational aspects of heritage (e.g. cultural tourism). Meanwhile, growing institutionalisation of conservation from the middle of the century had resulted in national and local government organisations taking control of conservation and developing policy frameworks that started to formalise processes. Through the education system and centralised heritage interpretation, the State also has the power to formalise the narrative of history that is passed down.¹⁸

The post-modern world view (commodification and neo-liberal solutions)

What by many may be seen as an architectural movements popularised in the US in the latter part of the twentieth century, historicism and post-modernism also coexist with heritage protection movements in their shared stand against modernism.¹⁹ Post-modernism, however, also signifies a shift from the modernist world view and has a profound impact, both in theory and through architectural practice, on the way conservation theory changed course in the latter part of the twentieth century.

Post-modernism both replaced the modern era and also continued it. By introducing a plurality, and the 'celebration of the regional, local and particular' it recognises that places, systems, cities, buildings, ideas are more complex.²⁰ It is not anti-modern but challenges the elitism of modernism and questions the absolute in history. In terms of cultural heritage this has probably resulted in a greater readiness for pastiche but also an engagement with multiple stories and associations with a place (multi-vocality), as explained by Umberto Eco:

The postmodern reply to the modern consists of recognising the past, since it cannot really be destroyed, because its destruction leads to silence, must be revisited: but with irony, not innocently.²¹

Others on the other hand have argued that post-modernism lacked the grounded theory that Modernism possessed and in being anti-modernist, often ignored the emerging issues of downtown blight, suburban sprawl or growing shanty towns.²² More specifically Jencks conceptualises post-modernism as a plurality of subcultures and the absence [or erosion] of cultural consensus.²³ There is an acceptance of the 'other',²⁴ an acceptance of others' views and value systems that is also revealed in the process leading up to the formulation of the Nara Document on Authenticity in 1994. In accepting that 'all judgements about values attributed to heritage as well as the credibility of related information structures may differ from culture to culture',²⁵ not only the way heritage was valued but also its conservation was placed on a new trajectory.

These new viewpoints also coincided with a shift towards a values-based approach to conservation. The idea that a heritage object contained within it a multitude of values

was first explored in depth by Alois Riegl, an art historian and conservationist working in turn of the century Vienna.²⁶ Riegl not only identified independent artistic and historic values to heritage, but also broke away from the empiricist and positivist tradition of valuing art works by recognising that the object also gained additional value through 'the subjective involvement of the viewer'.²⁷ The plurality of the values based approach aligns with multi-vocality in the acceptance that there will be multiple values associated with or ascribed to a place.²⁸ As articulated by Araoz: 'the core values of heritage are now increasingly deemed to reside in the cultural meanings and values humans invest in monuments and landscapes, not their physical substance'.²⁹ Widely publicised by the Getty Conservation Institute the values-based approach is formalised in the later editions of the Australian ICOMOS Burra Charter and the 2008 English Heritage Principles.³⁰

Other movements such as environmental movements, that impact on conservation today, also have their origins in post-modernity, as paradoxically does the growth of neo-liberal economic policies. References to heritage as a consumer 'product' and an 'industry' appears more frequently in the literature from the 1980s³¹ alongside the commodification of heritage as a tourism product.³² Others have linked such commodification to the emergence of an 'experience society'.³³ In the current day, this trend is played out in social media and the eponymous 'bucket list', which one commentator refers to as 'an altruistic list of commodified experiences'.³⁴

In the context of experiencing heritage, the interpretation of buildings and places of historic significance, and subsequently their management becomes as much a point of discussion and debate as the more doctrinal charters that determine approaches to their conservation. The *Management Guidelines for World Cultural Heritage Sites* by Bernard Feilden and Jukka Jokilehto³⁵ amongst others in the 1990s marks a notable culture shift, especially as the authors are closely linked to what Jokilehto himself calls Modern Conservation and its scientific basis. The lukewarm reception to the Charter of Krakow of 2000, intended as a replacement or alternative to the Venice charter, may also be explained by changes in attitude to doctrinal texts.

There is an evident move away from conservation science during this period and rapidly changing perspective on what constitutes heritage, authenticity and integrity. In the international context, this is best observed through the shifting emphasis of the World Heritage list and the decision-making frameworks that determine selection as well as acceptable conservation methods and standards.

Science, values and ethics

The latter part of the twentieth century is not only marked by a broadening remit for cultural heritage, but also by new scientific challenges for the repair of an equally broad pallet of 'new' materials, some of them experimental in nature. It is no small irony that some modernist works of architecture, originally designed to move away from the status quo and 'traditional', have now come to be regarded as classics,³⁶ and as objects of conservation interest are considered for their heritage value. The practical conservation challenges presented by this new form of heritage has also led to some philosophical soul searching.³⁷ These buildings of the machine age are much less likely to be valued for their material craftsmanship, but more for their expression in terms of design, the theoretical stances embedded within the design and the innovative technologies of their time. Traditional

approaches to repair or indeed small maintenance interventions rarely address the pioneering construction philosophies or the limited aesthetic appeal of aging concrete.³⁸

The 'reconstruction' of the French Pavilion in Zagreb is a case in point. Originally constructed in 1937, by the time of its conservation in 2007 the metal elements had become corroded beyond repair and most of the timber panels and windows were rotten. The resulting project involved the re-making of both the structural component and roof as well as the timber elements above plinth level, leaving only the concrete plinth to remain from the original building. Nonetheless, a near-faithful replication of the original has been achieved.³⁹ This project exemplifies the shift from material authenticity as guide to conservation to a clearly values-based approach, whereby the design authenticity is taken as the prevalent value rather than the largely machine produced components (Figure 3).

These new types of approaches also align with a shift from the conservation of truth to the conservation of meanings in contemporary conservation.⁴⁰ The complex nature of meanings or values and the network of overlapping interests that they are linked to provide the basis for negotiation. Thus, conservation is increasingly becoming a process of negotiation, as the management of cultural heritage becomes based on models of consultation and participation, that are intended to give those 'affected' by a site a 'voice'.⁴¹

This shift in methodology linked to values-based approaches has also instigated discussions on the power of the present-day public to determine what is kept and what is demolished. In an example cited by Schmidt,⁴² a German publicist on behalf of the Green party advocates the de-Nationalisation of heritage proposing a direct public say in what is kept, so that heritage with negative connotations [in the present day] or buildings that are 'ugly'



Figure 3. The restored French Pavilion in Zagreb, Croatia where the conservation of the early twentieth-century building considered its design integrity to be of greater value than some its poorly performing material elements.

are not preserved. In contrast, this ‘democratisation’ in heritage discourse,⁴³ was ignored in the demolition, despite local protests, of the German Democratic Republic era Palace of the Republic in Berlin and its replacement with a new building in the style of former Prussian Palace, in a project that is billed as a ‘reconstruction’.⁴⁴

In its contrariness to the basic tenets of twentieth century conservation charters, this conjectural and interpretive rebuilding of the Palace also heralds a new era in conservation theory. As the conservation of meaning and value is closely linked to identity, the built heritage is becoming something that is manufactured as a validation of value and meaning rather than historic truth or authenticity. In this era of meaning, each object or place will have *meaning* to people, but in different ways to each person. This cannot be measured through objective tools, but its presence can be ‘judged under ethical and moral criteria’.⁴⁵ The ethics debate therefore also centres on the role of negotiation, balancing different interests and possibly also those of future stakeholders in Ruskin’s principle of trusteeship. This is a significant shift from the scientific ethics embedded in conservation theory which is usually concerned with serving the best interest of the ‘object’ and the modernist principle that cultural heritage, as a physical object, is a finite and irreplaceable asset. In effect, not only are there multiple ways of viewing and valuing heritage and authenticity, there are also multiple ethical standpoints.

Globalisation, commodification and authenticity

Globalisation, set apart by its scale, speed and universality defines our modern day⁴⁶ generating not only uniformly produced spaces but also the need for locally distinctive expression. The fear of cultural homogenisation as the same products and lifestyles are being consumed globally, is instigating a search for local identity and distinctiveness that can also bring a ‘unique’ or different product to the market in a competitive global marketplace. Cultural heritage in this respect has often been identified as a valuable distinguisher of local character and identity.⁴⁷

A growing trend to reconstruct or even to construct historic buildings and urban quarters, often in an effort to re-shape and re-define local identity by emphasising historic connectivity can be closely associated with globalised consumer cultures. There is nonetheless a notable power shift from the collective body of the State authorities and largely middle-class supported amenity societies to the private sector developer, and the increasing influence developers have over the planning process to shape development. The market concept of re-created heritage is the focus of Umberto Eco’s seminal essay *Travels in Hyperreality* where ‘heritage’, real or otherwise, as seen in a number of US attractions, has become an experience that is traded.⁴⁸ Thus heritage has become a commodity, in the same way that a World Heritage Site (WHS) nomination is pursued as an economic development opportunity (Figure 4).

In Dubai, the building of an entire historic quarter on similar lines to what was there on the basis of old photographs is partly linked to a desire to bolster a bid for WHS status, but also along with other similar reconstruction projects interpreted as a means of building a uniting Emirati identity.⁴⁹ In China, meanwhile a growing trend of constructing historic quarters, often linked to ethnic minority and vernacular traditions, serves an expanding domestic tourism market. Ultimately the State is using the physical environment to shape a collective national identity, whether it is of a past empire or the ‘noble savage’



Figure 4. The old town of Quebec in Canada, a World Heritage Site, is largely rebuilt but still provides enjoyment and a historic town experience to the thousands of tourists that visit each year.

approach to its minorities. Much of this activity is being carried out in the name of conservation or as an act of conservation. It could be argued that Frampton's critical regionalism is meeting Eco's hyper-reality. What is obvious is that the value of the 'truth' in the case of architectural heritage is disappearing.

In the early twenty-first century, heritage not only has to pay for itself but must also deliver monetary benefits. The growth of the heritage interpretation industry is about making the past more accessible and also more profitable. 'Enlarged or diminished, embellished or purified, lengthened or abbreviated, the past becomes more and more a foreign country, yet also tinged with present colours'.⁵⁰ Once heritage has been commodified and obtained a monetary value, then it is inevitable that approaches to its conservation will also be centred on increasing market value.

Science versus community

In the post-modern world view and the values-based approach to heritage conservation and presentation, emphasis is placed on local community views and values and participatory approaches to the process. The English Heritage Principles for example explicitly stress that 'the historic environment is a shared resource' and that 'everyone should be able to participate in sustaining the historic environment'.⁵¹ This is elaborated in the Burra charter:

*Conservation, interpretation and management of a place should provide for the participation of people for whom the place has significant associations and meanings, or who have social, spiritual or other cultural responsibilities for the place.*⁵²

Local connections and memories alongside collective memory also determine the way in which heritage is valued.⁵³ Although others have argued that in capitalism, power ‘enables one class to exploit another’, and that heritage designation may be to the advantage of a certain group that will stand to gain (e.g. economically) rather than for ‘societal interest’.⁵⁴

The sense of ‘shared’ is further emphasised in the notion of ‘celebrating’ cultural diversity, whilst greater human movements and migrations are also shifting societal views of identity in relation to land or place.⁵⁵ The promotion of cultural heritage as a shared asset such as through the World Heritage Convention or numerous EU programmes directed at a shared European heritage also emphasise notions of shared duty and responsibility.

Community participation in the protection of cultural heritage is a result of the broadening remit of heritage and therefore local and personal identification with it, the adoption of a values-based approach giving a voice to a broad church of interest groups, and a gap created by the diminishing power of institutional players. The growing role for well-meaning amateurs in the conservation process simultaneously devalues the scientific and technical aspects of conservation, and the role played by experts, including in building crafts. Community-based approaches ultimately generate conflict with professional judgments that are either scientifically informed or concentrated on tangible rather than emotional values.

Concerns are raised that the decision-making process in conservation is moving from being scientific, and some may say elitist, to becoming egalitarian whereby decision-making is supposedly being placed largely in the hands of a local community who identify with it. In the political field of shrinking states and a growing ‘heritage’ burden, governments are no doubt welcoming seemingly altruistic/inclusive/participatory opportunities of passing on responsibility and obligations to society under the guises of volunteerism or crowd sourcing.⁵⁶ In the UK the Conservative government’s ‘big society’, and the previous Labour government’s inclusivity agenda may be viewed as thinly veiled tactics of spreading the burden.

Another argument is that conservation has become process rather than product driven. Decision-making based on discussion and consensus reverses the expert centred approaches of the past. Thus, the role of the conservation professional is increasingly becoming one of managing the participatory process.

Placing community at the heart of decision-making and pioneering locally driven bottom-up approaches is itself contested by neo-liberal policies and commodification (and monetisation of heritage), as power shifts away from the state to multi-national firms.⁵⁷ As the State loses power, participation and social inclusion have often followed a parallel trajectory to market-led privatisation practices, and the reduction of funding to the arts and cultural sectors. There is a strong worldwide neo-liberal agenda for the devolution of public sector responsibilities to the private sector and the built heritage is no exception. Economic viability and future profitability have also come to dictate the way in which conservation is approached, whilst campaigns to privatise national heritage assets in countries such as Italy are accompanied by pressures to turn a profit. Both phenomena nonetheless question the role the State apparatus will continue to have in guiding, determining and policing heritage conservation practice.

With a proliferation of attitudes to conservation and the advocacy of values-based methodologies, conservation doctrine can be applied to a wide range of approaches.

An international conservation debate over the way in which the Bamiyan Buddhas in Afghanistan, blown up by the Taliban in 2011, would be repaired saw the use of conservation theory to justify both the leaving the remains as they are and to partially rebuild.⁵⁸ More pertinent, however, was a proposal to construct a large visitor centre in a post-modern 'vernacular' style with the explicit intention of 'making money' for the site as a tourist attraction.

In the same way that design theory is evaluated in the subject-object norm of Greek philosophy as both an artistic process (subjective) and a scientific process (objective),⁵⁹ the values-based methodology representing the subjective approach, needs to be complemented by grounded scientific approaches. More complexly conservation alters objects and their meaning, it is not about restoring them to an original meaning, but 'adapts them to present-day expectations and needs' and on this basis is both a creative and a scientific activity.⁶⁰ A shrinking State and loss of institutional and policy strength, and expert knowledge with it, generates a gap that is being filled on one hand by community-led bottom up approaches, volunteering and creative enterprises, and on the other hand the private sector developers and investors.

Conclusion

Amongst various design theories, the spirit theory advocates that 'spirit of the time' is a decisive element in the production of the built environment; others meanwhile refer to prevailing social and economic conditions as being a major influence.⁶¹ The production of new spaces is inescapably linked to the treatment afforded to existing ones. Conservation consequently follows a similar trajectory to architectural theory and is likewise influenced by the spirit of the time and prevailing social and economic conditions locally and globally. Conservation in whatever age is a way of interpreting history through material remains, informed by the meanings and values of the present. Principles provide guidance, but can also be interpreted according to the meanings and values of the social, economic and cultural context in which this is taking place.

Where much debate will continue to surround the relevance of the now over 50-year-old Venice Charter and the wording of the 1994 Nara Document, the question may not be about how these doctrinal texts are updated, but whether such charters or doctrines are still relevant at a time when more dynamic approaches such as adaptive capacity and flexibility are seen as the determinants of resilience and sustainable places and institutions. At a time when we expect to have tested methodologies and established benchmarks we are finding ourselves confronted with conflicting priorities, global uncertainty and multiple approaches to 'conservation'.⁶²

Although this article has argued that conservation theory and practice have come a long way since their origins in the nineteenth century, in a number of ways their contemporary predicament bears a strong resemblance to the nineteenth century. For example, the ethical standpoints that may appear to be diametrically opposed (e.g. Morris and Violet-le-Duc) were in fact derived from shared philosophical principles and world view. In the present day too, the basic principles of conservation are often being used to support and justify very different approaches to conservation and reconstruction. Today's diminishing and weakening institutional frameworks, and the growing power therefore of private developers or funders to determine what is conserved and how is also not dissimilar to the nineteenth century conservation landscape.

Although it can be argued that the broadening remit of heritage to encompass many different forms of architectural, urban and landscape legacies, and to temporally adjust to more recent periods of history, places pressure on the interpretation and adaptation of doctrinal texts, there are also other factors at play. Heritage has become a global concern with powerful new players who are now engaged in conservation practice and research.⁶³ As these players implement projects within their own cultural environments and under the guise of their own notions of authenticity, conservation is moving away from its long held Western power base and philosophical home.

Meanwhile, in the Western world, a diminishing role of the State and with it the role of the expert, doctrine-embedded conservation policies of the twentieth century have not only lost their influence, but significantly also the power and will to implement them. What we have today is a power shift in who is interpreting conservation principles: from the established norms of the State apparatus and its institutional structures and professionals to the neo-liberal marketplace where the consumer exercises their democratic right to buy and to sell, and the market delivers accordingly.⁶⁴

Consequently, there is a proliferation of new ways in which heritage is transmitted and ultimately consumed, not least via social media, and values continue to evolve in a global and a local cultural context. In response, the construction, rebuilding, embellishment and re-interpretation of historic buildings is becoming bolder and brasher. The post-modern notion of multi-vocality and multiple narratives is openly being replaced by the notion of alternative narratives. Although the way in which cultural heritage is valued, protected and conserved has always conveyed a chosen or selected message, be it political, historical or cultural, the current so called post-truth era both blatantly and unapologetically opens the doors to construct, re-construct and shape 'heritage', rather than take a sensitive approach to the conservation of the evidence base. In the post-truth era will authenticity even matter?

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