

## **A contemporary provocation: reconstructions as tools of future-making**

With the recent destructions of cultural heritage in the Middle East on our minds and a widely shared concern for the future development of areas affected by a high loss of human lives, religious extremism, political instability, large numbers of refugees and the catastrophic outcomes of war, the question of future reconstructions of destroyed cultural heritage has become critical.

Given that ruins and the heritage of war are both significant parts of cultural inheritance, and form an essential element in the mental landscape of peoples, the question arises: can the reconstruction of such inheritance play an important role in the process of rebuilding society in the wake of destructive events? Recent research suggests that heritage values are not inherent in the tangible fabric of heritage but derive from its intangible perceptions and uses in society. It can be argued that reconstructions, whether creative or faithful, enhance the societal benefits of heritage, for example by providing communities with a common purpose and promoting joint values of peaceful cohabitation.

Further questions arise regarding the issues involved: could reconstructions be seen as manifestations of desirable futures and tools of future-making?

Parallel considerations arise: artifacts, productions and events (including those that address desirable futures) constructed in our time can be validated as expressions of contemporary culture. Where this claim is extended to reconstructions of objects derived from the past, two initial sets of questions present themselves:

1. questions relating to the relationship of the reconstructed artifact with the inherited artifact; equivalence of value; appreciation of the time factor and issues of cultural memory;
2. questions regarding the passage of time, our experience of this, the understanding of the temporality of artifacts in contemporary times, the impact of digital realities – at what point does/can/will the cultural production become describable as “heritage”? What mechanisms are at work?

The 2014 Nara+20 document (2014)<sup>1</sup> recognises 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”. The document also acknowledges that “the concept of cultural heritage itself assumes diverse forms and processes”. It also recommends further work “on methodologies for assessing this broader spectrum of cultural forms and processes, and the dynamic interrelationship between tangible and intangible heritage”.

Reconstruction of inheritance results from heritage processes associated with post-war or post catastrophe recovery and societal reconstruction. Reconstructions are new and

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.law.kyushu-u.ac.jp/programs/english/nara-plus20/index.html>

the result of changes to the pre-existing heritage. It can be argued that, in addition to their being a form of witness, they are also themselves valuable as heritage to the extent that they possess pastness and contribute to societal future-making. In this context, debates on authenticity and reconstruction should be revisited, and hypothesis and conditions of the previous debates should be identified in order to enable scientific debates.

These considerations have led to the decision to hold an international workshop at ICOMOS Paris from 13-15 March 2017. This workshop is a pilot project of the ICOMOS University Forum to stimulate dialogues between academics and heritage experts. These above-illustrated issues will be discussed in accordance with the following themes to contribute to refining ICOMOS thinking in the process of developing new policy regarding reconstructions in post-traumatic situations and beyond. The workshop is being organised jointly by ICOMOS and Kyushu University, Japan.

Three themes are proposed.

Theme 1: From Nara to Nara+20: where is authenticity now?

Authenticity has long been the normative framework for discussions about reconstruction. Thirty years after the Venice Charter, the Nara Document recognized the cultural dimension of development. Since then the interrelationship between heritage and society obtained practical significance and intensified in many ways. Today, authenticity is back on the agenda and turns out to be a complex topic of different definitions and perspectives brought to bear on a variety of contemporary reconstructions of the past. This is the context where we should approach authenticity today to ask ourselves “where are we now”?

Theme 2: Creating heritage-making futures?

It has long been held that the legacy of the past needs to be conserved for the benefit of future generations, as well as for our own. In conserving what we received we have created “heritage”. In this theme we ask about the positive contributions that such heritage can make to the lives of future generations, in the light of the impacts of historical, cultural and natural changes and transformations. How will what we now accept as heritage improve specific futures? Is there a role for reconstructions?

Theme 3: Conservation as management

Conservation has long been considered as the management of change. A primary change has been in understanding the scope of the legacy. In parallel, the range of stakeholders has extended beyond the traditional conservation disciplines and authorities to encompass disparate social groups and communities, participants in identifying and valorising aspects of the legacy, including its potential reconstructions. We ask what consequences for reconstruction flow from this process of change, from the shift in the social roles, powers and capacities that are brought to bear, including the implications for understanding, resource allocation and knowledge and cultural development.

## **The Workshop Concept**

The Workshop is intended to be an intensive, exploratory experience in which the participants engage in open discussion in a multi-disciplinary environment. Numbers will be small (30-35) in order to encourage the maximum engagement with the perspectives of participants. The language of the Workshop will be English.

The Workshop will be constructed as follows:

1. Participants will be confirmed on the basis of short abstracts (500 -1000 words), received by the Working Group by 27 October 2016. Abstracts may be submitted either in English or in French. Decisions of acceptance will be made by 10 November 2016.
2. The selected abstracts will be circulated to all participants in advance of the workshop.
3. Following brief introductory context-setting statements, participants will be assigned to a small group devoted to one of the three themes outlined above. While, in assigning participants to each group, consideration will be given to the choice of theme by the participants, the overriding concern of the organisers will be to ensure that groups are as balanced as possible.
4. Groups will be asked to prepare a summary of their discussions for presentation to the workshop at a plenary session.
5. Following the workshop, these summaries will be circulated to all participants.
6. At this stage, participants will be asked to prepare full papers in English (6000 words) with a view to publication. These papers will generally develop the theme of the participants' original abstract. However, they must also explicitly reflect on and take into account the discussions that have taken place during the workshop. This requirement is a precondition for publication.
7. The papers will be peer-reviewed by the Working Group and considered for academic publication in a printed volume. All peer-approved papers will be published open-access online with permanent availability.

### **Working Group**

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Abstracts should bear a title and the name and academic affiliation of the author, and be submitted as a .doc or .docx file to: [secretariat@icomos.org](mailto:secretariat@icomos.org) with the subject line "Your last name/ ICOMOS University Forum Workshop on Authenticity and Reconstructions".

Further particulars concerning the arrangements for the workshop will be sent to the authors of accepted Abstracts early in 2017.