

Post-trauma Reconstruction

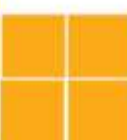
Concept paper

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Preamble

The effects of catastrophic events on environments of cultural value are widely and rapidly disseminated in the contemporary world. Along with the impact of natural disasters, the familiar continuing degradation of areas of historic settlement through deliberate destruction of material culture has acquired new potency as a propaganda weapon through the power of digital media. The destruction of buildings of symbolic value has long been a device of war: societies and civilizations overturned and their artifacts dissipated and destroyed. In our times events present themselves as they happen. No longer remote in space or time, the human consequences play themselves out with rapidity and at a scale that challenges resolve, imagination and the frameworks for thought and action. Some themes suggest themselves.

The first theme concerns transmission in the face of destruction. Within that apparent contradiction lies a question of meaning and a question of ethics. Analogous confrontations between ethical considerations and potentials for intervention arise in other fields. Where a place of cultural value is destroyed or damaged, the perception from outside is often of irretrievable loss. And yet: in the face of destruction the human instinct is to re-build, to ensure continuity as far as possible, to re-establish the conditions for personal and social life, including a physical environment that can support the activities that lend purpose and dignity to existence. In the face of destruction, physical environments acquire additional meanings and symbolic value. They represent, not just a lost communal identity, but also the hope of somehow regaining or restoring it. The reconstruction of what has been destroyed can be either a social and cultural imperative or an effort to portray a pyrrhic victory as a real one. It brings with it changes in the uses of historic fabric, corrections of perceived imperfections, introduction of new technologies and services. These are classic challenges for conservation even where deeper imperatives are absent.



In our contemporary circumstances conservators (and by extension the organizations related to their purposes) face the deeper imperative and a consequent question: whether erasing the scars of war is the forgery of the historic record, whether the transmission of heritage can find itself on the side of new life, whether it can balance action based on inherited value with action that supports a different state of being. The degraded sites will endure in some way. To embrace that fact will raise issues of design and interpretation as well as conservation, if theme park and pastiche and forgeries are to be avoided.

The second theme derives from the first and concerns intellectual tools

If the question is a legitimate one, it suggests a fresh appraisal of the tools at our disposal and a creation of new ones. On a number of well-documented instances, ICOMOS has reported on the reconstruction of sites destroyed by war. These reports have informed the debate on the question of reconstruction in general, but have their origins in actions that addressed the impact of traumatic and widespread destruction. Their focus was to establish whether the reconstructed sites met the test of authenticity required for inscription on the World Heritage list. Where inscription followed it was accompanied by the qualification of exceptional circumstances - a phrase whose meaning comes into focus again today. One can anticipate also issues of meaning and representation, where residual oppositions persist.

In those debates, a key factor was the progressive exploration of what constituted authenticity in such circumstances, and the discussion has accommodated a shift from a perspective rooted in the material artifact towards a perspective that also embraces immaterial, spiritual, historical and cultural considerations. One could say that the need to take account of the specificities of the cultural context has allowed an accommodation rather than a resolution, one that has enabled the interweaving of parallel understandings, enabling them to coexist.

Can this precarious accommodation endure as contemporary events provoke action-oriented reflection? Are there implications for key texts and methods of post trauma engagement?

The next theme concerns engagement and appropriate operational tools.




Doctrinal texts relating to conservation cite the need to engage local communities in the process as it unfolds. The primary tenet has been that the fundamental responsibility for care and transmission lies with the culture that has created/inherited the artifacts in question. One notes that the Nara +20 statement has questioned whether this is valid in all circumstances. In many cases the ability to do so is lacking, and not just in cases of trauma; *inter alia* the “state parties” may have limited capacity/authority, communities may be displaced and replaced by populations without specific cultural links to the place. In the globalized world the wider international community may assert a primary interest. Methods and established processes of intervention to salvage and transmit cultural inheritance come into focus.

In the aftermath of conflict, relationships will remain fluid, with implications for intervention strategies. This kind of situation is familiar to a range of other intervention agencies, and dialogue with them would be helpful.

ICOMOS as an organization devoted to the transmission of cultural inheritance as a global concern, may need to address how its mission can be advanced in the specific circumstances in question. Early engagement, while problematic, will enable the organization to participate in shaping the problem formulation perhaps as has been suggested, through the development of criteria to establish the validity of certain reconstructions. It will help clarify the potential scope for action, where to act and how, and to engage in dialogue regarding choices that will be made.

We can refer to the 2001 UN General Declaration on Cities, with its reference to “a special moment” in human history, where the references are to human disasters, conflicts and the refugee phenomenon, and the need for contemporary action, and to the recent proceedings of the Nara + 20 process.



What might a meeting do?

The themes outlined are inter-related. They are broad, and may seem to present a somewhat “outside the box” perspective. If as a whole they comprise a thematic framework, then they need further discussion with ICOMOS to focus ideas further and to identify contributors who can distil experiences and open up discussion.

Suggested structure of the March meeting:



09.00 Registration, welcome, introductory remarks, etc

10.00 Presentations:

- post trauma reconstruction: impacts on the understanding of authenticity; reflections on post trauma reconstruction actions;
- articulation of material/immaterial values in degraded sites; material expression of cultural identities; hybridization
- meeting the future: intervention and choice; institutional and “on the ground” experiences in post trauma intervention; articulation of strategies; potential alliances and actors

12.30 Lunch break

14.00 Discussion groups/ chairs/rapporteurs

16.00 Colloquium: rapporteurs

17.00 Concluding summation: next steps

The structure of the event is intended to allow for open yet focused discussion and an opportunity for reflection on contemporary experiences that have worldwide resonance. It can also be seen as a preparatory event for the ICOMOS scientific symposium in October 2016.

Some thoughts regarding outcomes

1. The immediate short-term outcome will be a report on the seminar, comprising the presentations, summary of discussions and a conclusion setting out the next steps.
2. An appropriate longer-term outcome would be the articulation of principles regarding the transmission of values and valorization of sites degraded by catastrophic events within the larger context of reconstruction.
3. A programme geared towards this longer-term outcome might include establishing either a single international working party or a small number of regional working parties, coordinated perhaps from the centre in Paris.
4. The process of developing this outcome should also be published in a way that encourages feedback from the international community, and particularly from those places whose circumstances come particularly into focus. The “project” will need careful articulation.
5. In time one can foresee the production of Operational Guidelines for the Management of Post-trauma cultural sites.

Some initial documentary reference points

- 1976 UNESCO. Recommendations Concerning the Safeguarding and Contemporary Role of Historic Areas (Warsaw-Nairobi)
- 1987 ICOMOS. Charter for the Conservation of Historic Towns and Urban Areas (Washington Charter)
- 1990 Charter for the Protection and Management of the Archaeological Heritage
- 1994 ICOMOS. Nara Document on Authenticity
- 2001 UN General Declaration of Cities and Other Human Settlements in the New Millennium
- 2014 Nara + 20. Statement adopted at the Meeting on the 20th Anniversary of the Nara Document on Authenticity, held at Nara at the invitation of the Agency for Cultural Affairs (Government of Japan), Nara Prefecture and Nara City, 22-24 October 2014.

Cameron, C., 2008. "From Warsaw to Mostar: the World Heritage Committee and Authenticity". APT Bulletin, Vol.39, No. 2/3, pp. 19-24

Younes, C., 2011. "Expectations. Between Conservation and Transformation of inherited milieu: inheriting and transmitting" in Kealy, L. and Musso, S.F. eds. *Conservation/ Transformation*. EAAE Transactions on Architectural Education 52, pp 27-29.

Jokilehto, J., 2015. "Reconstruction in the World Heritage Context" in Crisan, R., Fiorani, D., Kealy, L., Musso, S.F., eds. *Conservation/ Reconstruction. Small Historic Centres: conservation in the midst of change*. EAAE Transactions on Architectural Education 64, pp 513-524

Stanley-Price, N., 2005.ed. *Cultural Heritage in Postwar Recovery*. ICCROM Conservation Studies 6. Rome

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