

# AUTHENTICITY IN CONSERVATION DECISION-MAKING: THE WORLD HERITAGE PERSPECTIVE

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## ABSTRACT

The paper treats the evolution of the use of authenticity as an important factor in assessing the suitability of nominations for inscription on the World Heritage List. It treats in sequence a number of major questions linked to authenticity:

- Is authenticity a heritage value in itself or a qualifier of heritage values?
- Is authenticity linked exclusively to authenticity of surviving material fabric or to other factors as well?
- What relation exists between authenticity and integrity?
- Is it possible to apply authenticity as a universal concept, or must assessments be modified in relation to context?
- How is it possible to use this concept in practical ways in conservation decision-making?

The above questions are examined in detail in the context of the ICOMOS-UNESCO-Japan Government 1994 Nara meeting on Authenticity held in Japan. The purpose of this meeting was to assess conservation practices (and "authenticity") in various regional contexts, and subsequent follow up meetings at international, regional and national levels, including the "Authenticity and Monitoring" meeting held in Cesky Krumlov in the Czech Republic in 1995, the "Inter-American Symposium on Authenticity in the Conservation and Management of the Cultural Heritage" held in San Antonio, in 1996, and the "Authenticity and Integrity in an African Context" meeting held in Great Zimbabwe, Zimbabwe in 2000.

This paper aims to provide administrators and professionals, a greater understanding of the principal issues in the application of the authenticity analysis in conservation decision-making, and their relevance in the context of World Heritage inscriptions.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Authenticity has long been one of the main goals of those involved with conservation work. While the Venice Charter does not refer to authenticity among its 16 articles, the preamble to the charter enjoins all its adherents to preserve monuments in the full richness of their authenticity.<sup>1</sup> This passion for the real and genuine is shared by professional and citizen alike, who seek to be in touch with the most truthful and believable expressions of the past. Disneyland has its place but its three-quarter scale reconstructions are entertainments and recreation, not windows to the past.

The World Heritage Convention has played a major role in giving more attention to the concept and in defining ways in which its assessments can assist in conservation action. But ten years after the Nara Conference on Authenticity (Nara, Japan, November, 1994) and five years after ICOMOS adopted the Nara Document on Authenticity (Mexico City, Mexico, Oct. 1999) as one of its seminal doctrinal texts, the concept is still a vexing one for many involved in conservation decision-making. In spite of the many regional and national meetings which followed the Conference, many of the issues that the Nara Conference set out to address remain open to debate:

- *Authenticity as heritage value? Or qualifier*

<sup>1</sup> The Venice (The International charter for Conservation and Restoration of Monuments and Sites, 1964).



*of heritage value?* Many continue to feel that authenticity is a value in its own right and must be considered as a component factor in assessing significance of heritage. Others (and these include those present in Nara) suggest that authenticity is a qualifying factor in assessing heritage value, a filter through which values may be understood to be real, credible or indeed legitimate.

- *Authenticity of fabric?* Many link authenticity to the survival and retention of original or significant fabric, opposing it to “accuracy” of restoration or reconstruction actions. Here authenticity can exist, but can not be restored or improved. For others who now associate the concept with a broad range of attributes, through which heritage values are manifest, including setting, function, tradition etc., authenticity can offer a multidimensional analysis of the truth offered by the full tangible and intangible reality of a heritage property. Here authenticity can be restored or regained. But which approach is best for conservation?

- *Authenticity or integrity?* Many have difficulty to distinguish authenticity from integrity. These difficulties are compounded by internal contradictions and practices in the use of language in the World Heritage system. These difficulties date from the beginning of efforts to develop practical guidelines for analysing nominations submitted to it. These contradictions include differences in preferences in different regions within the cultural heritage field, differences in approaches between cultural and natural heritage fields, and changes in thinking in the 26 years of application of the World Heritage Convention. But which word to use? Or is the word choice important?

- *Authenticity a universal concept?* Many have difficulty to integrate the concept in their work in their own heritage systems, lacking a precise linguistic equivalent in their own language. Is the Nara Document, one of the first international documents to promote the importance of conservation decision-making in cultural context, guilty of promoting a universal standard not relevant to all?

- *Practical utility of authenticity concept?* Many



**Figure 1:** Circo Massenzio, Via Appia Antica, Rome. “For most, the word authenticity suggests the degree to which original building fabric or material may survive as testimony to a building’s beginnings”.

have difficulty to implement use of the concept in conservation decision-making in a practical way, asking how to go beyond the abstractions implied in defining authenticity for World Heritage sites, and to begin to apply the concept? How can we use it to influence, modify or direct conservation treatment decisions?

## 2. BACKGROUND

Before looking at each of these questions in more detail, let's go back to the Nara Conference itself which provides a context for considering these questions. The Conference was born in the desire of one country, Japan, to join the World Heritage Convention in the early 1990s, and to ensure that conservation practices on its nominated sites would



be judged fairly by World's Heritage Evaluators. Japanese conservation professionals were concerned in particular that their practice of occasional dismantling of wooden temples as part of long term care and conservation would be seen as an unsound conservation approach by European assessors, as not sufficiently respecting the original materials and craftsmanship used in construction of wooden temples. The result of Japan's questioning of the absoluteness of the standards for judgement applied was an international conference held in Nara in November, 1994, hosted by Japan, and supported by ICOMOS and the World Heritage Committee.

The Nara Conference brought together 45 international experts to look at the legitimacy of conservation practices in Japan but also in many other countries. Judgements about authenticity were seen as characteristic indicators of approaches in different cultural contexts. The Conference resulted in a document (the Nara Document on Authenticity) which both broadened the application of authenticity, extending the factors considered in authenticity analysis from the tangible attributes of material, design, setting and workmanship to the often intangible, dynamic attributes of function, tradition, and spirit, and also clearly stated the importance of making conservation judgements within the local cultural context.<sup>2</sup>

The meeting also provided indirectly a definition of authenticity: a measure of the degree to which the values of a heritage property may be understood to be truthfully, genuinely and credibly expressed by the attributes carrying the values.

Following the Nara meeting, and in line with the cultural relativism promoted by the Nara document, a number of regional and national meetings have been held to permit exploration and adaptation of authenticity analysis in various working contexts.



**Figure 2:** Japanese domestic building. "The Nara meeting of 1994 was organised to ensure that conservation practices were assessed within their own cultural context, and that practices such as the occasional full or partial dismantling of heritage structures such as this Japanese structure would not be judged by European or western standards, (where the practice of dismantling is unknown, and not well understood)."

The most important of these have been the following:

- Authenticity and Monitoring, October 17-22, 1995, Cesky Krumlov, Czech Republic, ICOMOS European Conference, 1995.<sup>3</sup> 18 European members of ICOMOS from 14 countries presented national views of the application of authenticity concepts. Presentations affirmed the importance of authenticity as a means of assuring truthful, sincere and honest approaches to conservation problems, and gave emphasis to strengthening its use with the dynamic conservation of cultural landscapes and urban settings.
- Inter-American Symposium on Authenticity in the Conservation and Management of the Cultural Heritage, US/ICOMOS, The Getty Conservation Institute, San Antonio, Texas 1996.<sup>4</sup> Participants from ICOMOS national committees

<sup>2</sup> The Nara Document on Authenticity, published in "Nara Conference on Authenticity", ed. Knut Einar Larsen (With J. Jokilehto, R. Lemaire, K. Masuda, N. Marstein, H. Stovel), UNESCO, Agency for Cultural Affairs (Japan), ICCROM, ICOMOS, 1995. Also now contained within Annex 4 of the proposed new version of the Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention. UNESCO. Tentative publication date, summer 2004.

<sup>3</sup> Authenticity and Monitoring, October 17-22, 1995, Cesky Krumlov, Czech Republic, ICOMOS, 1995.

<sup>4</sup> "Inter-American Symposium on Authenticity in the Conservation and Management of the Cultural Heritage", San Antonio, Texas, May 2001, US/ICOMOS - The Getty Conservation Institute, Washington 1997.



of North, Central and South America debated the application of the concepts of Nara. The meeting adopted the Declaration of San Antonio, which discussed the relationship between authenticity and identity, history, materials, social value, dynamic and static sites, stewardship and economics.

- **Authenticity and Integrity in an African Context:** expert meeting, Great Zimbabwe, Zimbabwe, 26-29 May 2000, UNESCO - World Heritage Centre.<sup>5</sup> Eighteen speakers looked at issues arising in management of both cultural and natural heritage properties. Among recommendations were suggestions to include management systems, language, and other forms of intangible heritage among attributes expressing authenticity, and strengthening the place of local communities in sustainable heritage management.

### 3. ISSUES IN AUTHENTICITY ANALYSIS

Lets return to the five questions raised at the start of this paper.

#### 3.1 Authenticity as Heritage Value? Or Qualifier of Heritage Values?

The World Heritage Convention Operational Guidelines<sup>6</sup> have always treated authenticity as a “qualifying condition” for cultural heritage properties, just as “integrity” is used for natural heritage properties. The Nara Conference confirmed this view, that authenticity should be understood as a modifier of values, a filter through which a property’s important values may be perceived clearly - or less clearly. Meeting the test of authenticity has been a requirement for World Heritage inscription since 1978, in the belief that the values defined as significant (as possessing “outstanding universal value”) should be expressed in genuine and real ways by the attributes of the property.

The view of the World Heritage Committee is now codified in Annex 4 of the new Operational Guidelines<sup>7</sup>. In part, the Guidelines state:

*“In applying the test of authenticity to nominations of properties of cultural value for inclusion in the World Heritage List, the following points need to be considered:*

*(i) Authenticity is not a value itself. Properties do not merit inscription on the World Heritage List simply because they are greatly authentic; rather, inscribed properties must demonstrate first their claim to “outstanding universal value”, and then demonstrate that the attributes carrying related values are “authentic”, that is, genuine, real, truthful, credible.*

*(ii) Authenticity is not an absolute qualifier. It is meaningless to state that such and such a property is “undeniably authentic”. Authenticity is a relative concept, and must always be used in relation to the ability of particular attributes to express clearly the nature of key recognized values.”*

#### 3.2 Authenticity of Fabric?

For many of those interested in authenticity, there has often been the assumption that what is being referred to is material authenticity, the survival of original or significant material fabric: an authentic structure or ruin would be one where the evidence of the passage of time is visibly and palpably present in the building, where the structural remains may be regarded as a physical document of change and transformation over time, where the building is essentially regarded as an artifact.

Application of the test of authenticity in the World Heritage context has however broadened the understanding of the different ways in which authenticity may be understood. The preparatory discussions for implementation of the World

<sup>5</sup> “Authenticity and Integrity in an African Context: Expert Meeting, Great Zimbabwe,” Zimbabwe, 26-29 May 2000, UNESCO-World Heritage Centre, Paris 2001.

<sup>6</sup> Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention. UNESCO 2002.

<sup>7</sup> Annex 4 of the proposed new version of the Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention, UNESCO. Tentative publication date, summer 2004.



Heritage Convention in 1976 and 1977 resulted in a definition of authenticity which went beyond material, to include design, setting, and workmanship. In other words, authenticity should be looked at relative to the particular values ascribed to a site. If the property is perceived as having value as a testimony of past achievement, then it would be important to question the authenticity of the material remains which express that achievement. If however, the value of a structure lies in the aesthetic quality of its design, then it becomes important to question the degree to which design intent is reflected in surviving fabric, forms and patterns. And equally so with authenticity of setting, and workmanship.

More recently, as a result of Nara, the interpretation of authenticity has broadened further. Discussion in Nara and in the preparatory meeting which preceded it in Bergen in January, 1994<sup>8</sup>, focussed attention on intangible attributes such as use, tradition and spirit, as contributing to understanding the authenticity of a property. A monastery which remains in religious use is more authentic than one which becomes a hotel. A structure animated by traditional activities and rituals is more authentic than one where these have been lost. And so on.

Annex 4 of the new Operational Guidelines supports the point that authenticity should be understood in a broad context, and suggests the process to be followed in assessing authenticity in this context<sup>9</sup>:

(iii) *“Once outstanding universal value is established for a property, it should be determined which attributes are primary carriers of the valuedefined: Material? Design? Workmanship? Setting? Tradition? Use? Spirit? Other attributes? And in what combination? And then asking: to what degree does this (or these) attribute(s) authentically (credibly, honestly, genuinely, truthfully) express or carry the defined outstanding universal value?”*



**Figure 3:** Palladian Basilica in Vicenza, Italy. “The definition by the World Heritage Committee in 1978 of the Test of Authenticity in the Operational Guidelines, added ‘Design, Setting and Workmanship’ to ‘material’ as authenticity references. Hence authenticity for this structure, notable for its design qualities, might imply primarily fidelity to the original design idea.”

(iv) *As a corollary, it should be noted that it is not important that a property's authenticity be demonstrated for all attributes (that is, for each of material, design, setting, workmanship, tradition, use etc.) but only for those that are considered to be significant carriers of the property's outstanding universal value.”*

### 3.3 Authenticity or Integrity?

The use of authenticity for World Cultural Heritage assessments, and integrity for World Natural Heritage assessments has led to some confusion. Are the two concepts different? Or are the two concepts addressing the same concern but with language from two different fields? Is it necessary to use different words for what seem to be similar concepts?

Indeed, over time, and as the Committee has tried to unify treatment of cultural and natural heritage, particularly since an experts meeting held in Amsterdam in 1998, the Committee has asked the same question.

<sup>8</sup> Conference on Authenticity on relation to the World Heritage Convention. Preparatory Workshop, Bergen, Norway, Jan. - Feb. 1994 (Ed. Larsen, K.E. / Marstein, N.) Riksantikvaren, Norway, 1994. This publication contains two articles by the author which describe this concept. Stovel, H., Notes on Aspects of Authenticity and Stovel, H. Notes on Authenticity.

<sup>9</sup> Annex 4 of the proposed new version of the Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention. UNESCO. Tentative publication date, summer 2004.





**Figure 4:** The town of Riomaggiore in the World Heritage Cultural Landscape of Cinque Terre, Italy. "The 1994 discussions in Nara extended the attributes used to assess authenticity to include 'dynamic' references such as use and function. Authenticity in relation to this cultural landscape then involves assessing not only the state of surviving physical elements or patterns but also the agricultural processes which have shaped and continue to shape the landscape."

The confusion in terminology is increased when one looks into the early history of the development of the test of authenticity described in the Operational Guidelines. In the expert meetings organised by UNESCO in 1976 and 1977 to develop evaluation procedures for assessing nominations to the World Heritage List, then ICOMOS Secretary-General Ernest Allan Connally proposed that the system of evaluation used by the National Park Service to determine the suitability of nominations to the American National Register be used as a basis for World Heritage

work.<sup>10</sup> The National Register system, once having established criteria for determining significance, also requires that the integrity of the property be demonstrated. Integrity of a property is defined in terms of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling and association. Sound familiar? Indeed, these words appear to be more or less the same attributes specified by the World Heritage Committee in applying the test of authenticity.

A further look into the history of the American

<sup>10</sup> These early meeting are described in notes prepared at the time by then ICOMOS Secretary General Ernest Allan Connally, and which have been used in the preparation of Dr. Connally's unpublished manuscript on the early history of the World Heritage Convention. In preparation for the Nara meeting of 1994, Dr. Connally gave the author access to his notes. These notes are referred to in the author's paper: Stovel, Herb, "Considerations in Framing the Authenticity Question for Conservation" p. 393-398, published in *The Nara Document on Authenticity*. Published in "Nara Conference on Authenticity", ed. Knut Einar Larsen (with J. Jokilehto, R. Lemaire, K. Masuda, N. Marstein, H. Stovel), UNESCO, Agency for Cultural Affairs, (Japan), ICCROM, ICOMOS. 1995.



approach reveals a 1953 National Parks Service Administrative Manual Reference to Landmarks:

“an essential consideration is that each one should have integrity – that is, that there should be no doubt as to whether it is the original site or structure, and in the case of a structure that it represents original material and workmanship”.<sup>11</sup> Integrity was further defined as a; “composite quality connoting original workmanship, original location and intangible elements of feeling and association”. These original factors were complemented by the addition of “design” and “setting” in the 1966 National Historic Preservation Act. Today, the National Parks Service describes integrity as the “ability of a property to convey its significance”<sup>12</sup>.

When Dr. Connally proposed adoption of this American approach in a meeting in March 1977 in Paris, Prof. Raymond Lemaire of ICOMOS suggested that the concept be retained but that the word “authenticity” would need to be used to describe this concept to better relate to conservation practice in most countries. The Committee ultimately adopted this approach; and Dr. Connally’s seven integrities became - at least initially - the four authenticities named in the World Heritage Committee’s “test of authenticity”.

The confusion is further increased with recent efforts to unify treatment of cultural and natural heritage which have resulted in a decision to complement the authenticity test for cultural heritage with an integrity test. (Note that no such reciprocal authenticity requirement is being imposed for natural heritage). The effort here in verifying integrity for cultural heritage properties is to assess the degree to which the nominated property is “whole” (that is, including all elements and systems necessary for the health of the system or the completeness of the message being conveyed) and “intact” (in relatively good condition, with forces of deterioration under control).

In the end, it is perhaps not very important to insist on choice of one word or the other. Indeed, some professionals advocate use of other filters such as “maintaining continuity” or “defining identity” in trying to talk about the quality and impact of the transmission of the values of a heritage property. The critical thing is the sub-text: is it completeness that is important? wholeness? intactness? realness? genuineness? truthfulness? credibility? These are the important ideas if one wishes to be sure that the tangible and intangible attributes of properties are effectively supporting and carrying the heritage values of a site or property.

### 3.4 Authenticity a universal concept?

The Nara Conference focussed attention on one concern expressed by many invited to speak, namely that in many countries and languages, it was difficult to find a single word which meant authenticity. If the word did not exist in the language, many asked, did the concept? What would be the point of discussing a concept for which no linguistic equivalent exists. The exchanges in Nara confirmed, however, that even where the larger concept of authenticity could not be translated by a single word, that the concept could be described in two or more words or phrases corresponding to the various aspects of authenticity looked at above: material authenticity; authenticity of design; authenticity of setting, and so on.

The same point continues to be raised in debate by certain scholars, overlooking the Nara determinations about the relevance of the authenticity concept. But in the end, the most important defences of authenticity do not derive from linguistic arguments but from the ability to demonstrate that authenticity analysis has practical value within the conservation decision-making process.

### 3.5 Practical Utility of Authenticity Concept?

The attraction of ICOMOS pioneers like Raymond Lemaire to the authenticity concept was based on the premise that this concept was of great practical

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*



utility in conservation. That by placing authenticity retention (or recovery) as a goal in their operations, conservationists were guided toward provision of optimal care for the heritage in their hands. How so? Where do these practical wellsprings lie?

This approach is best described in the Management Guidelines for World Cultural Heritage Sites by Jukka Jokilehto and Sir Bernard Feilden published by ICCROM-UNESCO-ICOMOS in 1993<sup>13</sup>, containing concepts first laid down as early as 1983 when the first drafts of the book were being developed. Chapter Eight which deals with authenticity places the concept within an analytical process moving from definition of heritage values through to conservation intervention decision-making.

The process is very straightforward. The conservation process is understood to begin with careful articulation of the heritage values of a site, followed by an elaboration of the particular attributes, features or elements which carry or express those values. (We have seen the beginning points of this process before in the application of the World Heritage Test of Authenticity).

But here the process is taken a bit further. The book asks readers to look at authenticity for materials, design, setting and workmanship in turn, and to assess the degree of authenticity present. If authenticity is high, then conservation interventions are guided toward retention (stabilisation, consolidation, maintenance) of important attributes defined. If authenticity has suffered with time, then conservationists are guided to either subtractive actions ("revealing" underlying

states or materials) or additive actions ("restoring" missing materials, elements, patterns or features), based on definition of actions which are understood to enhance authenticity. This approach can not actually be defined as offering guaranteed scientific certainty about conservation decisions, but at least it offers an orientation which can bring consistency to intervention across the many aspects of a site to be dealt with in conservation analysis.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

As yet, there are no clear cut answers to the questions posed here. Authenticity analysis and applications are slowly being led toward greater consistency by the use of the Nara discussions within the World Heritage framework. At the same time, there remains great scope to fit and shape the Nara conclusions to the relevant cultural circumstances in many regions and settings. The greatest value of the Nara Document in fact lies both in its stimulus to adapting the universal or global to the local (the Nara Document offers a distinct anti-globalising stance), and in the encouragement it has offered to local and regional debates in this area.

This debate is not closed, inside World Heritage or beyond. All readers of this article who harbour the desire to explore these points further (or to document doubts and suspicions) will find encouragement within the international bodies to do so. I would personally be delighted to hear from readers who wish to pick up any of these points and to challenge my interpretation or to ask for advice in carrying this debate further in their own jurisdictions■

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<sup>13</sup> Feilden, B., Jokilehto, J., "Management Guidelines for World Cultural Heritage Sites", UNESCO-ICCROM-ICOMOS; 1993. In particular, these concepts are developed in Chapter Eight on Authenticity and Treatment.