

HERITAGE AND DEMOCRACY

**HERITAGE
AND
DEMOCRACY**

Veröffentlichungen des Arbeitskreises Theorie und Lehre der Denkmalpflege e.V., Band 33.



Jahrestagung 2024 des Arbeitskreises Theorie und Lehre in der Denkmalpflege e.V. in Coventry, 03. bis 06. Oktober 2024
in Kooperation mit und gefördert von der Abteilung Gebaute Umwelt der Universität Coventry.

Heritage and Democracy

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Englischsprachiges Lektorat: Dave Morris

Bibliografische Information der Deutschen Bibliothek

Die Deutsche Nationalbibliothek verzeichnet diese Publikation in der Deutschen Nationalbibliografie;
detaillierte bibliografische Daten sind im Internet über <http://dnb.dnb.de> abrufbar.



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Die Online-Version dieser Publikation ist auf <https://www.arthistoricum.net>
dauerhaft frei verfügbar (Open Access).

urn: urn:nbn:de:bsz:16-ahn-artbook-1649

doi: <https://doi.org/10.11588/arthistoricum.1649>

Publiziert bei

Universität Heidelberg/Universitätsbibliothek, 2025

arthistoricum.net – Fachinformationsdienst Kunst · Fotografie · Design

Grabengasse 1, 69117 Heidelberg

<https://www.uni-heidelberg.de/de/impressum>

E-Mail: ub@ub.uni-heidelberg.de

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Umschlagabbildung: Taufbeckenfenster (Baptistry Window) von John Piper in der Kathedrale von Coventry, Coventry 2025

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eISSN: 2511-4298

ISBN: 978-3-95954-188-6 (Druckausgabe)

ISBN: 978-3-98501-369-2 (PDF)

Verlag Jörg Mitzkat, Holzminden 2025

www.mitzkat.de

Arbeitskreis Theorie und Lehre der Denkmalpflege e.V.

Heritage and Democracy

Herausgegeben von
Sabine Coady Schäbitz und Svenja Hönig

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Preface by the editors

SABINE COADY SCHÄBITZ AND SVENJA HÖNIG

The 2024 annual conference of the Association for Theory and Higher Education of Heritage Conservation (AKTLD) took place from the 3rd to the 6th of October in Coventry. Invited by the Department of the Built Environment at Coventry University, the conference explored the relationship between Heritage and Democracy.

This publication brings together a collection of the different contributions to the topic by analysing heritage under the categories of the public good, civil society, politics and polity. The conference examined heritage processes which operate in conjunction with the notion of democracy and how cultural heritage is shaped, interpreted, and managed in democracies and also within non-democratic societies. The emphasis was on public participation, contested narratives, and the influence of political structures. One of the key questions posed by the conference was: who defines and controls heritage, especially in times of rising populism and shifting state ideologies?

Coventry was an interesting place to hold this conference. The city shares a heritage with Germany which is mostly associated with the destruction of the city by German bombers of the Nazi Regime. The publications in this volume are framed by papers which examine the loss, memory and actions after that turning point as well as a perspective on wider developments in Coventry since the early 20th century. The role of Coventry as a city of peace and reconciliation, which has taken on since the Second World War was also the subject of various discussions during the conference. This role is further outlined in the introduction.

Early on in the planning of the conference, we decided to conduct it in English. Although the Arbeitskreis has held multi-lingual conferences before, we believe this to be the first time that we predominantly conferred in English as a lingua franca. This was as a courtesy to the British host city and host university and moreover enabled us to promote inclusivity towards a wider non-German-speaking audience.

St Mary's Guildhall in the very centre of Coventry, adjacent to the cathedral, provided a stimulating and convenient venue for the event. Largely built in the late 14th and early 15th centuries, it is one of the most interesting – and one of the lesser known – examples of medieval guildhalls in England. It was the headquarters of the powerful merchant guild of St Mary. Delegates had the opportunity, among other benefits, to see and hear more about the remarkable tapestry in the Great Hall, woven in Flanders in the early 16th century and assumed to be the oldest tapestry in Britain still hanging in the place for which it was created. After the dissolution of the monasteries and the guilds in the 1530s and 1540s, the city purchased St Mary's which then became the administrative home of the city council until 1920. For several centuries it was therefore the seat of local government, which was characterised by increasingly democratic decision making since the middle of the 19th century.

In addition to the presentations and discussions in St Mary's Guildhall, the city of Coventry acted as the wider conference venue. A varied series of fringe events offered delegates the opportunity to explore the city under different aspects and meet people who are active in the Heritage sector, either as professionals or in a voluntary capacity. Such events included tours of the post-war urban development and the attempts of integration of surviving medieval buildings since then. Highlights were visits to Coventry Cathedral and to the recently reopened Charterhouse. The programme concluded with a tour of the London Cemetery Arboretum, one of the earliest Victorian garden cemeteries in the country, designed from 1845 onwards by Joseph Paxton. In addition, formal receptions were held in the new Coventry Cathedral building and in the undercroft of St Mary's Guildhall.

All this was enabled by close collaboration of many participants, to all of whom we extend our heartfelt gratitude.

For the preparation of the academic content, we would like to thank the members of the scientific conference committee of the AKTLD, joined by Johanna Blokker, Sigrid Brandt, Christiane Fülischer, Claudia Marx, Ulrike Plate and Thomas Will. The collaboration during this planning phase was an intensive and enjoyable collegial process, which reinforced the aim of the conference to act as a positive voice for Heritage and Democracy.

A big thank you must be extended to the local organising team in the Coventry University Department of the Built Environment, specifically Amela Bogdanović, Adelina Skirth und Danny McGough for their creative and tireless commitment during the planning and implementation of the conference.

Special thanks also go to Peter Walters and Paul Maddocks from the Coventry Society and Michael Grass from the Thüringisches Landesamt für Denkmalpflege for the lively tours of the city; to M. Lorenz, the architect who guided us through all the historic stages and contemporary challenges of the Cathedral complex and to The Very Revd John Witcombe, Dean of Coventry Cathedral. John Whitcombe not only generously enabled us to hold a memorable reception in the iconic post-war part of the Cathedral but also reiterated the long-standing reconciliation process between Coventry and Germany, which has been generated to a significant extent through the offices of Coventry Cathedral. In addition, we would like to extend our gratitude to Mark Webb for his deliberations about the tapestry at St Mary's Guildhall, to Stephen Oliver and James Hinde from Oliver Architects for their insights into the latest restorations and interventions of St Mary's Guildhall as well as to David Mahony from PCPT Architects for his tour of the recently restored and re-opened Charterhouse, one of the few remaining medieval monasteries in Coventry. Last but not least

a big thank you goes to Jamie Magraw for his entertaining tour through Joseph Paxton's Arboretum and for his general commitment to the conference together with Ian Harrabin and Geoff Willcocks, who, together with Mark Webb are all trustees of the Historic Coventry Trust, which looks after several conservation objects in the city.

In addition, we are grateful for the support of Coventry University for their sponsorship of the conference. We are thanking the publishing house Jörg Mitzkat and their staff for the smooth implementation of these conference proceedings, as well as the scientific editing services of Dave Morris.

Following our call for papers we received a large expression of interest and we were in the fortunate, but also difficult, position of having to choose from a large number of proposals. We selected what we deemed to be the most relevant responses to the topic and the questions we raised, whilst at the same time seeking a balance of themes and speakers from different countries and backgrounds. There were many other interesting proposals which could fill an entire second conference and publication. Our heartfelt gratitude goes to all those who actively participated in the conference and the publication, and we would like to extend these thanks to all who submitted their ideas.

Ultimately, we feel we can say that the conference was a great success, enabled by the professional collaboration of many enthusiastic and committed colleagues: something the Arbeitskreis has been doing well for so many years.

We hope that this publication will deepen the memory of those who joined us in Coventry, and moreover, that it will reach a wider audience, inspiring new perspectives and initiatives for future debates on heritage in relation to democratic structures, organisations and practices.

Vorwort der Herausgeberinnen

SABINE COADY SCHÄBITZ UND SVENJA HÖNIG

Coventry war der Ort, an dem die Jahrestagung 2024 des Arbeitskreises Theorie und Lehre der Denkmalpflege e.V. (AKTLD) vom 3. bis 6. Oktober stattfand. Auf Einladung der Abteilung für Gebaute Umwelt der Universität Coventry beschäftigte sich die Tagung mit dem Verhältnis zwischen Kulturellem Erbe und Demokratie.

Diese Publikation beinhaltet eine Zusammenstellung der verschiedenen Beiträge zu dem Thema unter den Kategorien des Gemeinwohls, der Zivilgesellschaft, der Politik und des Staatswesens. Die Tagung befasste sich mit Prozessen im Bereich des Kulturerbes, die in Verbindung mit dem Begriff der Demokratie stehen, und den Fragen danach, wie das Kulturerbe in sowohl demokratischen als auch nicht demokratischen Gesellschaften bestimmt, interpretiert und verwaltet wird. Schwerpunkte waren Öffentlichkeitsbeteiligung, umstrittene Narrative und Einfluss der politischen Strukturen. Eines der Hauptanliegen war die Frage danach, wer das Kulturerbe definiert und kontrolliert, ein, wie es sich herausstellt, ständig wichtiger werdendes Problem in Zeiten des Aufschwungs populistischer Bewegungen und sich verschiebender staatlicher Ideologien.

Coventry war ein interessanter Ort für dieses Thema. Die Stadt verbindet mit Deutschland vor allem ein Erbe, das mit der Kriegszerstörung von deutschen Bomberkommandos des Naziregimes in Zusammenhang gebracht wird. Die Veröffentlichungen in diesem Band sind gerahmt von Beiträgen, die sowohl den Kriegsverlust, die Erinnerungen und Folgen nach diesem Wendepunkt untersuchen als auch weitere Entwicklungen in Coventry seit dem frühen 20. Jahrhundert beleuchten. Die Rolle als Stadt des Friedens und der Versöhnung, die Coventry seit dem Zweiten Weltkrieg ausübt, war auch Gegenstand verschiedener Diskussionen auf der Tagung. Auf diese Rolle wird in der Einführung noch näher eingegangen.

Schon im frühen Stadium der Tagungskonzeption haben wir uns für Englisch als Tagungssprache entschieden. Der Arbeitskreis hat schon des öfteren

mehrsprachige Tagungen abgehalten, in Coventry haben wir wohl zum ersten Mal ausschließlich auf Englisch als Lingua Franca konferiert. Dies erwies den Gastgebern in Coventry Respekt, und beförderte die Einbindung eines größeren Kreises nicht-deutschsprachender Teilnehmer.

St Mary's Guildhall, zentral unmittelbar neben der Kathedrale gelegen, war ein inspirierender und gut zugänglicher Veranstaltungsort. Der noch zu grossen Teilen aus dem späten 14. und frühen 15. Jahrhundert stammende Bau ist eines der interessantesten – und eines der weniger bekannten - Beispiele mittelalterlicher Gildebauten in England. Er war Hauptsitz der einflussreichen Kaufmannsgilde von St. Mary. Unter anderem hatten die Tagungsdeligierten die Möglichkeit, den bemerkenswerten Wandteppich im Großen Saal zu besichtigen, der im frühen 16. Jahrhundert in Flandern entstand und vermutlich der älteste seiner Art in Grossbritannien ist, der noch an seinem ursprünglichen Bestimmungsort hängt. Nach der Auflösung der Klöster und Gilden in den 1530er und 1540er Jahren, erwarb die Stadt den Gebäudekomplex und beherbergte dort bis 1920 ihre Hauptverwaltung. St Mary's war also über Jahrhunderte Sitz lokaler, seit der Mitte des 19. Jahrhunderts zunehmend demokratisierter Entscheidungsfindung in Coventry.

Neben den Vorträgen und Diskussionen im Guildhaus, war die Stadt Coventry der erweiterte Tagungsstandort. Ein vielfältiges Rahmenprogramm ermöglichte es, Coventry unter verschiedenen Aspekten zu erleben, und professionellen und ehrenamtlichen Akteuren in den Tätigkeitsbereichen von Kulturerbe und Denkmalpflege zu begegnen. Dies beinhaltete Führungen durch die städtebaulichen Entwicklungen der Nachkriegsperiode und zum Umgang mit den noch vorhandenen mittelalterlichen Bauten seit dieser Zeit. Höhepunkte waren der Besuch des Kathedralkomplexes von Coventry und der kürzlich wiedereröffneten restaurierten Klosteranlage Charterhouse. Das Programm schloss mit einer Führung durch das London Cemetery Ar-

boretum, einer der frühen viktorianischen Gartenfriedhöfe in Grossbritannien, gestaltet ab 1845 von Joseph Paxton. Zusätzlich gab es Abendempfänge in dem neuen Kathedralsbau von Coventry und in den Gewölbekellern des Gildehauses.

Dies alles wurde ermöglicht durch das Zusammenspiel vieler Beteiligten, denen an dieser Stelle unser herzlicher Dank gebührt.

Für die inhaltliche Vorbereitung danken wir den Mitgliedern des wissenschaftlichen Tagungskomitees des AKTLD, zusätzlich bestehend aus Johanna Blokker, Sigrid Brandt, Christiane Fülcher, Claudia Marx, Ulrike Plate und Thomas Will. Die Zusammenarbeit in der Planungsphase war ein intensiver und bereichernder kollegialer Prozess, der uns darin bestärkt hat, die Tagung zu einem positiven Sprachrohr für das Thema Kulturerbe und Demokratie zu gestalten.

Ein grosser Dank gilt dem örtlichen Organisationsteam von der Abteilung für Gebaute Umwelt an der Universität Coventry, im Besonderen Amela Bogdanović, Adelina Skirth and Danny McGough für ihren inspirierenden und unermüdlichen Einsatz bei der Vorbereitung und Durchführung der Tagung.

Besonderer Dank geht auch an Peter Walters und Paul Maddocks von der Coventry Society sowie Michael Grass vom Thüringisches Landesamt für Denkmalpflege für ihre engagierten Führungen durch die Stadt, an M. Lorenz, die Architektin, die uns mit den verschiedenen Entwicklungsphasen und heutigen Herausforderungen des Kathedralskomplexes vertraut machte, sowie an John Witcombe, den Hochwürdigen Dekan der Kathedrale Coventry. John Witcombe ermöglichte uns nicht nur einen erinnerungswürdigen Empfang in dem ikonischen Nachkriegsbau, sondern ging auch sehr anschaulich auf die jahrzehntelange und bis heute andauernde, von der Kathedrale initiierte Versöhnungsarbeit zwischen Coventry und Deutschland ein. Weiterhin gebührt unser Dank Mark Webb für seine Erläuterungen zu dem bedeutenden Wandteppich im Gildehaus, Stephen Oliver und James Hinde von Oliver Architects für die Einblicke in die jüngsten Restaurierungs- und Umbaumaassnahmen des Gildehauses als auch David Mahony von PCPT Architects für seine denkmalpflegerische Führung durch die

frischrestaurierte und neueröffnete Klosteranlage Charterhouse, eine der wenigen noch verbliebenen monastischen Häuser in der Stadt. Und nicht zuletzt gebührt ein grosser Dank Jamie Magraw, für die unterhaltsame Wanderung durch Joseph Paxton's Arboretum, und sein generelles Engagement um die Tagung zusammen mit Ian Harrabin und Geoff Willcocks, ebenso wie Mark Webb alle vier in ihrer Rolle als Kuratoriumsmitglieder des Historic Coventry Trust, der als Trägerverein mehrerer Denkmalobjekte in Coventry fungiert.

Zusätzlich danken wir der Universität Coventry für ihre Förderung der Tagung. Dem Verlag Jörg Mitzkat und seinen Mitarbeitenden verdanken wir die reibungslose Verwirklichung dieses Tagungsbandes, zusammen mit dem engagierten Lektorat von Dave Morris.

Unser Call for Papers hatte sehr viel Resonanz gefunden und wir waren in der glücklichen, aber auch schwierigen Lage, aus vielen Vorschlägen wählen zu können. In unserer Auswahl haben wir uns für die Beiträge entschlossen, die uns für das Thema und seine Fragestellungen am relevantesten erschienen, und wir waren gleichzeitig darauf bedacht, eine ausgewogene Mischung aus Beiträgen verschiedener Länder und Umstände zusammenzustellen. Es gab viele andere interessante Einreichungen, die eine gesamte zweite Tagung und Publikation füllen könnten. Unser herzlicher Dank gilt allen denjenigen, die aktiv an der Tagung und der Publikation beteiligt waren, aber auch allen, die darüberhinaus ihr Interesse bekundeten.

Insgesamt, so glauben wir sagen zu können, war die Tagung ein grosser Erfolg, ermöglicht durch die professionelle Zusammenarbeit vieler enthusiastischer und engagierter Kolleginnen und Kollegen, etwas, das dem Arbeitskreis seit vielen Jahren immer wieder gelingt.

Wir hoffen, dass die Publikation die Erinnerungen an die Tagung derer, die in Coventry dabei waren, vertiefen wird, und darüberhinaus einem weiteren Publikum neue Perspektiven und Anstösse für zukünftige Debatten über das Verhältnis des Kulturerbes zu demokratischen Strukturen, Organisationen und Praktiken vermittelt.



Abb. 1

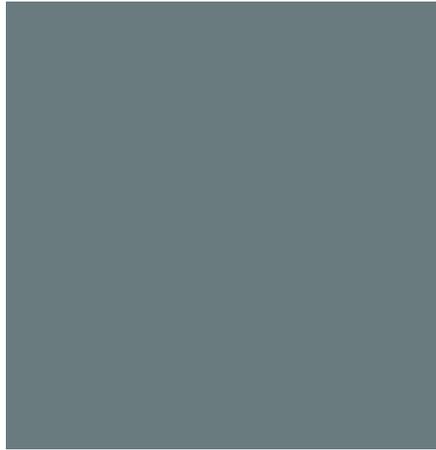


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Abb. 5



Abb. 6

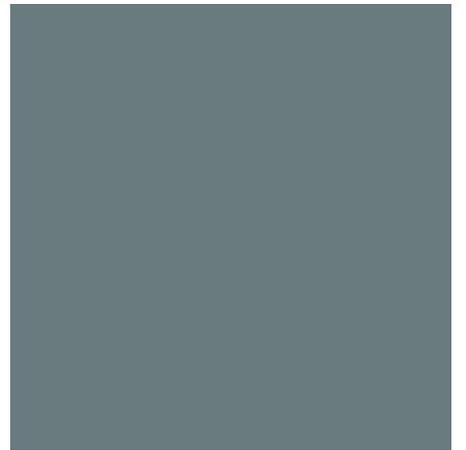


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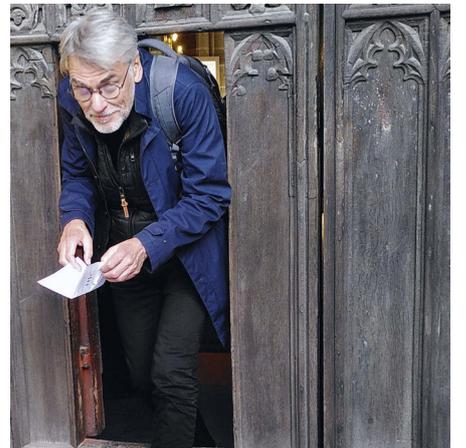


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Abb. 10



Abb. 11

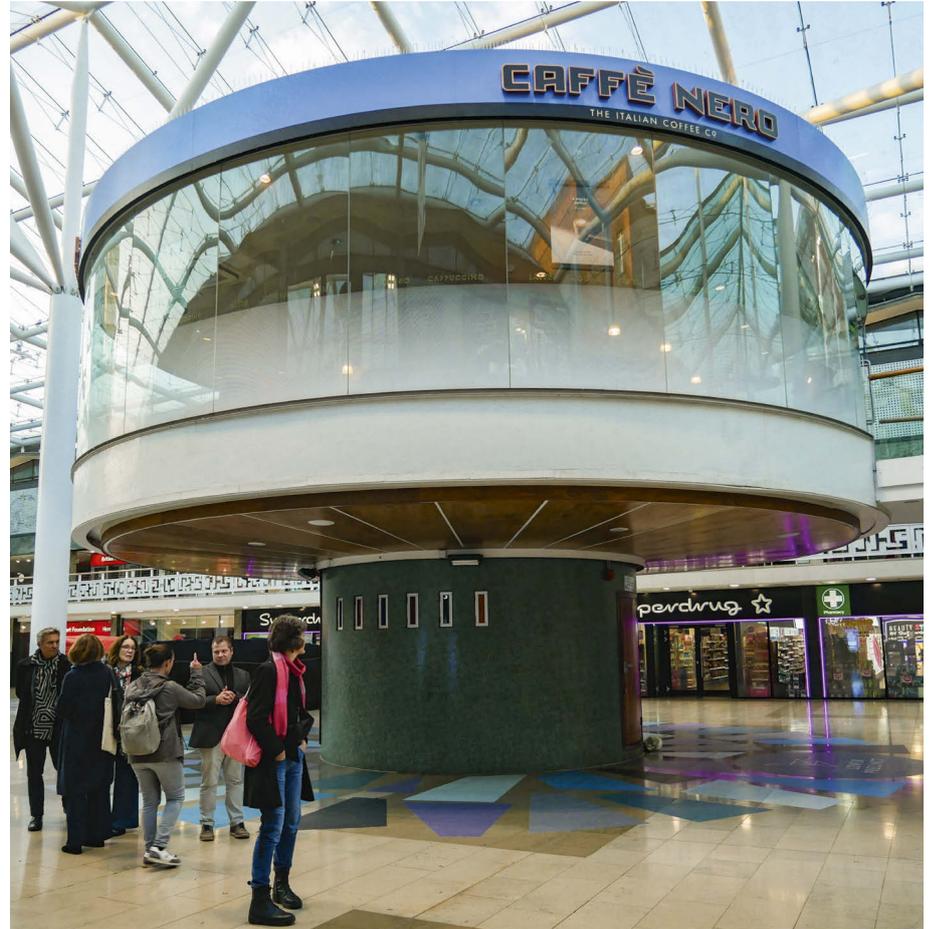


Abb. 13



Abb. 12



Abb. 14

Abbildungsnachweis

1-3 Michael Schäbitz

4-7 Christian Raabe

8 Thomas Will

9-14 Eva von Engelberg



Abb. 15



Abb. 16



Abb. 17



Abb. 3

Abb. 4



Abb. 18



Abb. 19

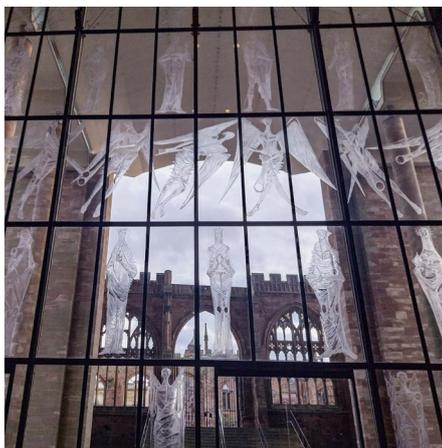


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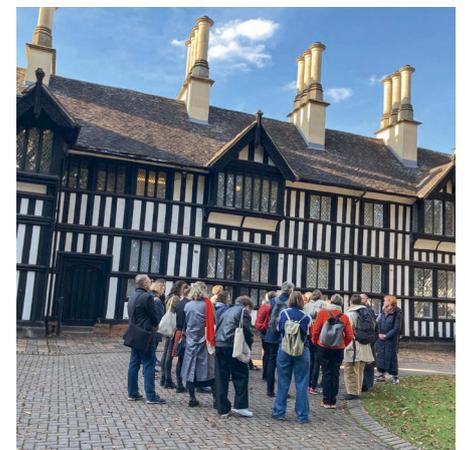


Abb. 26



Abb. 27



Abb. 28



Abbildungsnachweis

15-22 Birgit Franz/Georg Maybaum

23-28 Sabine Coady Schäbitz

Heritage and Democracy

Introductory Thoughts

SABINE COADY SCHÄBITZ

For the *Arbeitskreis für Theorie und Lehre der Denkmalpflege* (Association for Theory and Higher Education of Heritage Conservation),¹ conferring about heritage is what we do as a matter of course. In contrast, conferring about democracy in such a direct way initially seemed somewhat outside our comfort zone. Yet, for a long time, our conferences – always on a topic of particular current relevance – have also touched upon social questions and, by extension, on the democratic structures within which the processes of heritage and its conservation are embedded. Founded in 1977, in the Federal Republic of Germany, the *Arbeitskreis* held its first – and only – conference in a non-democratic state in 1986 in the People's Republic of Poland, in Gdansk. The city of Gdansk played a pioneering role in resisting the undemocratic communist regime in the then Polish People's Republic. Gdansk was the wellspring of the *Solidarność* movement, the independent trade union, which significantly contributed to the fall of the Iron Curtain and ultimately to the reunification of Germany. The topic at that conference was post-1945 reconstruction, focussing largely on Gdansk, but also featuring a comparison with Nuremberg and paving the way to examining questions of '*Denkmalpflege*' – the German word for, ostensibly, the care of listed buildings, but in its meaning so much broader and encapsulating all the complicated questions of cultural heritage which arise across different regimes.

The first conference held in a city of the former German Democratic Republic (GDR) in the newly united Germany took place in Weimar in 1993. It was, in its own right a significant democratic event, particularly for the colleagues from the former GDR. The topic of democracy also played out in the conference session which explicitly dealt with 'inconvenient' heritages; for instance, the state architecture of dictatorships² and how to deal with them in democratic states.

Over the last twenty years, our conference topics have more variously touched upon themes in the

wider realms of politics and democracy, namely on: public listed buildings and monuments (Dessau, 2005), social space (Leipzig, 2007), questions of borders and governmental changes in European regions (Strasbourg, 2008), post-1945 reconstruction (Utrecht, 2010, revisiting this topic nearly a quarter of a century after the Gdansk conference), contested heritage (Bolzano, 2012), values and evaluation (Cottbus, 2013), re-nationalisation and shared heritage (Tallinn, 2018; already under the cloud of the Russian invasion of Ukraine with the 2014 occupation of Crimea), on actors and stakeholders (Aachen, 2019), and on emotions with a focus on politicisation, mobilisation, and attachments (Bamberg, 2020).

Most recently, we discussed crises and disasters in heritage conservation (Zagreb, 2024), and not just with regard to the unsettling shocks of literal earthquakes.³ This impressive list indicates that reflecting on questions of democracy in relation to heritage has a longstanding tradition within the *Arbeitskreis*.

The conference in Coventry has been the first with the term 'democracy' in its title.

What motivates us to discuss heritage with such an explicit reference to democracy at this moment in time? I know what has driven me to do this: It is the concern that successful, democratic stability cannot be taken for granted, even in established democracies. I come from a generation which still grew up in the so-called German Democratic Republic – a state '*democratic*' in name only. The peaceful transition to democracy and unity – not just in Germany, but across much of Eastern Europe – brought not only manifold opportunities, but also the hope that a move to democratic governments would be the inevitable trajectory of our time. The following years were accompanied largely by a sense of optimism which, notwithstanding regional conflicts in areas such as the former Yugoslavia, was pervasive across Europe and throughout the wider democratic world.

More than a third of a century later, we find ourselves at a juncture, where democratic institutions are once again being questioned; a process

supported by volatile political trends, which undermine science, international collaboration, and mutual understanding across the world. This was already palpable when we first decided on this conference in September 2023. Subsequent global, European, and national events have accelerated and sharpened a sense of the precariousness of our democratic structures. There has been backsliding on democratic developments⁴ over at least the last two decades: a “democratic recession” which we must confront.⁵ This means that a renewed appreciation of democratic values is needed, in tandem with a fightback through democratic processes in practice.

“Arguably, the importance of liberal democracy is two-fold: no other system of government guarantees the right to free expression of political preference; and no other system promotes progress through peaceful competition between different interests and ideas.”⁶

Friedrich Schorlemmer, the prominent East German civil rights activist, who died in 2024, remarked: “Democracy is like a garden – if you don’t tend to it, then it quickly goes wild!”⁷ We are now looking at an increasingly “wild garden”. Since we first started to conceptualise the topic in 2023, the debates about democracy have become yet more acute. This, in turn, intensifies the question: to what extent do we need to position or re-position ourselves professionally, in relation to heritage, the theory and practice of which we, the members of the AKTLD have dedicated large parts of our lives to.

Much like heritage protection, democracy is an ongoing activity of care rather than a one-off achievement – a journey rather than a destination. Cultural heritage, its designation, interpretation, and management are of course always affected by political circumstances. Whatever the approach taken towards heritage in democratic societies, it must be subject to public scrutiny, thereby necessitating dialogue and discourse beyond heritage professionals.

We work with the underlying assumption that cultural heritage in democratic societies and its publicly funded managing organisations are acting in the interest of the public good. This is increasingly being challenged not only by the voting public, but also by various representatives of the state.

During the later years of the UK’s most recent Conservative government (ending in 2024⁸), a group of Members of Parliament objected to the National Trust exploring the colonial history of many of its properties. This led most extremely to death threats

against the historian leading the inquiry and the director of the National Trust.⁹ The question arises, what happens when democratically elected members of the legislature start to influence investigative and diverse narratives in the pursuit of popular support, thereby undermining egalitarian values of heritage and culture which heritage professionals have, arguably, been taking for granted? Where should the sovereignty of interpretation lie when populism is on the rise? Who defines, interprets, uses, or instrumentalises heritage and for what purposes? How do we prevent heritage practices from being harmful to democratic processes? ... Whose heritage is it, anyway?¹⁰

Democratic processes are increasingly differentiated between top-down and bottom-up decision making, the field of cultural heritage is no exception. There are many perceptions as to how this differs in various national contexts. Through the conference and with this publication, we have brought together

& HERITAGE DEMOCRACY



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Arbeitskreis Theorie und Lehre der Denkmalpflege

Annual Conference of the Arbeitskreis für Theorie und Lehre der Denkmalpflege
in collaboration with Coventry University Built Environment [CUBE]

Coventry 03. – 06. October 2024

Fig. 1: Cover of the Conference Programme.

different national perspectives which explore the reality behind these perceptions.

The *Arbeitskreis* is steeped in discourse from a perspective of the canon of cultural heritage, its protection and conservation which has been developed over more than 200 years, originally in the context of the European Enlightenment and more recently that of globalisation. Yet in all the conferences listed above, we also always tentatively questioned this canon. The 2020 conference in Bamberg was of particular note in this context, querying as it did whether an allegedly scientific¹¹ approach to defining and managing heritage is still the way forward.¹²

In his contribution to that conference, Gerhard Vinken went even further by making the case for a *Re-Politisation* of the protection and management of cultural heritage.¹³ Vinken warned us not to hide behind notions of science, objectivity, and neutrality when dealing with the *wicked problems* of cultural heritage.¹⁴ International heritage discourses have been pointing this out through the key notion of Critical Heritage Studies. Vinken has been particularly concerned about the political self-restraint of the German heritage conservation sector,¹⁵ something which, although historically understandable, needs to be overcome.

Questions have been raised recently about the extent to which the German military should consider ceasing its arguably non-political stance. For very understandable historical reasons this reluctance to be involved in overtly politicised activity, notably outside its own borders, has been a cornerstone of the nation's sense of itself. There may be a read-across here to our own area of interest. Significant historical and cultural developments in Germany and across the wider world may make the case for a more interventionist, less disinterested frame of mind, among those who hitherto considered themselves - even defined themselves - by their professional neutrality.

Within any democratic system there are sub-systems. The one we are professionally most familiar with is of course that of the institutions of architectural heritage protection. However, like individuals, each of these sub-systems cannot be an island: they must sustain the ability creatively to interact with other systems. In the UK, for example, the charitable and community sectors are generally upheld and even revered as traditional pillars of British society, not least in the heritage sector. Equally, *English Heritage and Historic England*, and their

equivalents in Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland, have long focussed on heritage for the cohesion and wellbeing of communities.¹⁶ “*Connecting Communities*” is one of the key headings¹⁷ on the landing page of *Historic England's* website. Heritage authorities in Germany – arguably organised on a more top-down basis than is the case in the UK – are also increasingly discussing their options for engaging with the public.¹⁸

Two of the key engagement practices are *participatory* and *deliberative* democracy. Participation focuses on empowering citizens to act; deliberation focuses on discussion and debate between citizens and other stakeholders. Deliberation “shifts the emphasis from the outcome of the decision to the quality of the process.”¹⁹ “Ultimately, citizens should be swayed by the force of the better argument rather than by private concerns, biases, or views that are not publicly justifiable to their fellow deliberators.”²⁰

One of the biggest challenges of all democratic practice is that it takes time and effort, or as Oscar Wilde might have said: “The trouble... is that it takes up too many evenings.”²¹ One of the great opportunities – and, we must admit, luxuries – of our *Arbeitskreis* conferences is that we do take considerable time and effort to deliberate and that we don't shy away from controversial discussions.

As outlined above, for the *Arbeitskreis*, this topic is by no means new territory. What *is* new – and growing – is the fragility we now sense in our own countries, many of them established democracies; this apparent move away from democratic values under the guise of an indiscriminate agenda of free speech, extreme identity politics, conspiracy theories, and a sense of entitlement to one's own “*truth*” among large parts of the population, and increasingly in young audiences.

An effective (if not failsafe) antidote to all this confusion is education. Although this is of course a truism, it cannot be emphasised enough as one of the key agendas of 21st-century societies. Education is not only in the title of the *Arbeitskreis*, but also a daily practice of most members of the organisation, and one of its key roots and founding principles.

The precariousness of our democracies is to some extent mirrored in the vulnerability of our academic institutions, either through diminishing resources or imperilled freedom of operation, where societal priorities lie elsewhere. It forces universities to justify their activities beyond the creation and transfer of knowledge. Such activities which reach

beyond the academy is something most members of the *Arbeitskreis* have been engaged in for many years and even decades. Collaborating with civil society and fostering the understanding that heritage is a powerful force in our societies can be one of our most significant contributions.²² Among all the disinformation and lies which pervade large parts of today's political discourses, it is more important than ever to educate ourselves and others – and specifically the next generation – about politics and how heritage work and knowledge of history can play a significant role in that.²³

Coventry was a most pertinent place to hold a conference of this topic by a Germany-based organisation. The city, to a certain extent, provides a conceptual background to the questions of heritage and democracy.

Coventry still often refers to its destruction by the totalitarian German regime. The ubiquitous presence in the city of the symbol of the Phoenix, rising from the ashes, is testament to that as much as the ruins of St Michaels, the former Coventry Cathedral and now part of the complex which includes the post-war Cathedral.

Coventry is internationally recognised as a city of peace and reconciliation. The commitment to this goes back to the Second World War. The very day after the bombing, the Cathedral clergy started a process of reconciliation, with a commitment to not seek revenge but instead to strive for forgiveness; and, after the war, to work with those who had been enemies, in order “to build a kinder ... world.”²⁴ Later, Coventry embarked enthusiastically on the town twinning movement, with both Dresden and Kiel becoming partner cities in the post-war years. Ever since it was bombed in 1940, the city has promoted mutual understanding, human rights, peace, and security as pillars of democracy. This is reflected in multiple initiatives, notably within *Coventry University* the *Centre for Peace and Security*, which also works on questions of heritage and human rights;²⁵ and within the wider city, the *Coventry Association for International Friendship*²⁶ (CAIF), which was formally constituted in 1962 in the very venue of our conference, St Mary's Guildhall.

The post-war reconstruction of the centre of Coventry was significantly facilitated by the war-time destruction. Yet it actually followed a vision developed in the late 1930s by the team of the city architect, Donald Gibson. Under a Labour council this was, ostensibly, the result of a democratic deci-

sion. In our publication, the section containing the papers is bookended by submissions that explore in particular the relationship between Coventry and democracy.

The are the overall guiding questions we initially put forward to frame the discussion and to challenge our contributors were these:

- Notwithstanding the assumed consensus on the superiority of democracy as the least objectionable of all state models, is there an indication that heritage discourses and protection practices serve democratic societies (more so than auto-cratonic ones)?
- How can discourses and practices of heritage uphold and develop democracy? And to what extent do they depend on it?
- What are the different heritage management practices of top-down/bottom-up decision making in national comparisons?
- What roles do heritage processes play in contemporary societies – both in support of state narratives and as oppositional and alternative practices?

The ways the contributors approached these questions were finally collected under the sub-topics of *Public Good*, *Civil Society*, *Politics*, and *Polity*, terms which of course overlap and intersect with each other yet nevertheless seem to us to provide a useful structure.

The formal presentation sections of the conference culminated in a panel discussion among colleagues in order to direct our conference topics to our own professional work, to our status as experts and towards the challenges we are facing in terms of authority and participatory decision making. We asked four professionals working in academia, practice, and administration about their experiences of working in and with institutions, which were set up and legitimised by democratic processes and law. Thomas Will introduced and chaired the discussion. He asked the participants to reflect on their understanding of four overarching themes: professional competence – the authority of expertise versus popular opinion; compromise – experts' role as professional arbiters in finding solutions; legitimisation – democratic mandate (top down) versus popular vote and grassroots politics (bottom up); and transparency – communication, participation and co-creating in decision making. The panel members were encouraged to talk about their own motivations and observations.

What is our non-disputable expertise and how should we communicate that? The answer to this is relatively easy regarding technical knowledge but becomes much more complex in questions of ethics and aesthetics, which are guided by values, emotions and sometimes habits. What became clear was that increasingly what is missing is not the expertise, but the acceptance of the knowledge behind the expertise. This recognition ultimately points to the ambivalence of heritage and its protection processes, which are being tested in each individual case.²⁷

Through this more interactive format of a panel discussion, we followed on from the preceding presentation sessions and continued a discussion which is always prevalent in the *Arbeitskreis*, whether in formal sessions or in all the in-between conversations. Key take-aways were not just fascinating insights into personal perspectives, but also the function of heritage experts as facilitators of expert teams – particularly in decision making processes where they act as mediators without necessarily being the final judge.

As with all conferences, the topic, the presentations, and the published articles evolve over time. They also don't provide a complete picture but rather a current snapshot of thinking and research, which forms the basis for further discussion and hopefully acts as an inspiration for others to join and continue the debate.

Attempting to summarise all the contributions would not do them any justice and would amount to a simplification which is not conducive to the understanding of the complexity and nuance of the topic.

Instead, at this stage I would like to reflect on the title of our conference. It is a title that also carries with it the risk perhaps of being too broad, of straying too far from the professional business of the way we predominantly understand our heritage work. Yet, we deliberately focussed on a multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary approach, bringing together researchers and activists from a broad range of professional backgrounds and from countries with varying degrees of democraticness. For me, it is this intersection between the disciplines and viewpoints, where we approach ideas tentatively yet with a kind of curiosity, which reveals for each of us our posi-

tionality, our own circumstances, and our values both as teachers as well as learners, in turn reflecting on and accepting the positionality of our counterparts. In our academic lives, these are normally colleagues or students, but we also have highly significant influence on the wider public. At some stage during this conference – and I recall some similar discussions at previous ones – we discussed how we can make the case for our own values without falling into the populist trap. Should we become lobbyists? We should certainly be wary of manipulating others, but we also do need to increase our efforts in one of our core activities – education. And we need to form further alliances: too often is the heritage sector still perceived as a sideshow in key societal developments. Bringing people along, communicating clearly – and, in the process of creating professionals, professing our values, and in this particular case our *democratic* values in relation to heritage, including to the wider public – will have to play a much more prominent role if the current political climate persists. If the call for re-politicising heritage was pertinent in 2020,²⁸ its potency has only multiplied since. This also means that representatives of the state in heritage matters need to reflect more critically on the power they are able to and perhaps ought to wield in wider society.

The integration of our understanding of heritage much more in conjunction with the notion of democracy needs to include heritage *in the* democratic process and heritage *as* a democratic process. Contemplating the title of the conference and this publication, it appears to me now that we must shift the emphasise of our activism – scholarly or otherwise – from Heritage *and* Democracy to Heritage *FOR* Democracy.

To me, democracy, despite all its imperfections and messiness, is a non-negotiable value. My professional values cannot be separated from it. It is my hope that this conference will provide a stronger impetus to think along these lines and develop creative approaches to the increasingly complex and volatile political landscape. As invoked by Lisa Marie Selitz in her contribution in this publication – in the words of Willy Brandt²⁹ from 1969, we ought to “... dare more democracy”, “... mehr Demokratie wagen”!

Figures

- 1 Illustration by Adelina Skirth, inspired by “The Table of Silence” 1937 by Constantin Brâncuși, as photographed by Iulian Oancia.

Endnotes

- 1 Working Group/Association for Theory and Teaching of Architectural Conservation, *Über den AKTLD*, <https://www.tu.berlin/denkmalpflege/aktld-e-v/ueber-den-aktld>.
- 2 Klaus von Beyme, Staatsarchitektur der Diktaturen – ein Object der Denkmalpflege?, in: *Denkmale und Gedenkstätten: Dokumentation der Jahrestagung*, Wissenschaftliche Zeitschrift der Hochschule für Architektur und Bauwesen, Weimar 41 (1995) 4/5 (Veröffentlichung des Arbeitskreises Theorie und Lehre der Denkmalpflege e.V., Band 7), pp. 179–184.
- 3 Further information on the publications of the Arbeitskreis can be found on the association’s website, currently hosted by the Technische Universität Berlin: <https://www.tu.berlin/denkmalpflege/aktld-e-v-1/publikationen>
- 4 Our World In Data, *Democracy Index*. Data adapted from the Economist Intelligence Unit; Gapminder; Various sources; and Bastian Herre, Lucas Rodés-Guirao, and Esteban Ortiz-Ospina, *Democracy*, 2023, <https://ourworldindata.org/grapher/democracy-index-eiu>.
- 5 Larry Diamond, Facing up to the Democratic Recession, in: *Journal of Democracy*, 26 (2015), No. 1, pp. 141–155, <https://www.journalofdemocracy.org/articles/facing-up-to-the-democratic-recession/>.
- 6 Chatham House, *The Importance of Democracy*, <https://www.chathamhouse.org/2021/04/importance-democracy>.
- 7 Friedrich Schorlemmer, *Demokratie lebt vom selbstbestimmten Mitmachen der Bürger*, 2013 [“Die Demokratie ist wie ein Garten, der verwildert, sobald man ihn nicht mehr pflegt.”], p. 1, <http://www.friedrich-schorlemmer.de/docs/2013-02-01-Mitmachen%20der%20B%20C%3BCrger.pdf>.
- 8 The Conservative Party held power in coalition with the Liberal Democrats (2010–2015) and then alone (2015–2024), spanning 14 years overall.
- 9 Ben Quinn, How the National Trust fought back against the culture warriors, in: *The Guardian*, 27 October 2024, <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2024/oct/27/how-the-national-trust-fought-back-against-the-culture-warriors>.
- 10 Sabine Coady Schäubitz, Whose heritage is it anyway? Denkmalschutz und Integration In Großbritannien, in: Birgit Franz and Gabi Dolf-Bonekämper (Hrsg.), *Sozialer Raum und Denkmalinventar: Vorgehensweisen zwischen Erhalt, Verlust, Wandel und Fortschreibung*, Dresden 2008 (Veröffentlichung des Arbeitskreises Theorie und Lehre der Denkmalpflege e.V., Band 17), pp. 84–86.
- 11 Alternatively, ‘academic’ or ‘learned’ in the wider understanding of the German word ‘wissenschaftlich’.
- 12 „Können wir weiterhin mit einem angeblich wissenschaftlichen Denkmalbegriff, der sich auf eine Mastererzählung, einen Kanon, beruft, Wertzuweisungen betreiben?“ Stephanie Herold and Gerhard Vinken, *Denkmal_Emotion: Eine Einführung*, in: Stephanie Herold und Gerhard Vinken (Hrsg.), *Denkmal_Emotion: Politisierung – Mobilisierung – Bindung*, Heidelberg 2021 (Veröffentlichungen des Arbeitskreises Theorie und Lehre der Denkmalpflege e.V., Band 30), p.10, <https://books.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/arthistoricum/catalog/book/920/chapter/13250>.
- 13 Gerhard Vinken, *Erbe und Emotionen. Zur überfälligen Re-Politisierung der Denkmalpflege*, in: Stephanie Herold und Gerhard Vinken (Hrsg.), *Denkmal_Emotion: Politisierung – Mobilisierung – Bindung*, Heidelberg 2021 (Veröffentlichungen des Arbeitskreises Theorie und Lehre der Denkmalpflege e.V., Band 30), pp.14–23, file:///C:/Users/ac4938/Downloads/arthistoricum-920-978-3-98501-043-1-CH05-1.pdf.
- 14 *Ibid.* pp. 20–21.
- 15 *Ibid.*
- 16 See also: Sabine Coady Schäubitz, *Kulturerbe und Sozialer Zusammenhalt. Ein anderer Wert in der Denkmalpflege-diskussion Großbritanniens*, in: Birgit Franz and Gerhard Vinken (Hrsg.), *Denkmale – Werte – Bewertung: Denkmalpflege im Spannungsfeld von Fachinstitutionen und bürgerschaftlichem Engagement*, Holzminde 2014 (Veröffentlichung des Arbeitskreises Theorie und Lehre der Denkmalpflege e.V., Band 23), pp. 112–120.
- 17 Historic England, <https://historicengland.org.uk/>. In fact, it used to be the top headline in September/ October 2024, but has now moved to place 4, with the top heading being ‘Protecting Our Heritage’.
- 18 Gerhard Vinken, op. cit.
- 19 Jennifer L. Eagan, *Deliberative Democracy (Political Theory)*, Britannica, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/deliberative-democracy>.
- 20 *Ibid.*
- 21 Oscar Wilde is said to have remarked: “The trouble with socialism is that it takes up too many evenings.” However, as with many quotes attributed to celebrities, this cannot be properly evidenced. See also: <https://quoteinvestigator.com/2019/06/03/evenings/>.
- 22 See also: Kathryn Lafrenz Samuels and Jon D. Daehnke (Ed.), *Heritage and Democracy: Crisis, Critique, and Collaboration*, University of Florida Press, 2023.
- 23 *Ibid.*
- 24 Coventry Cathedral, *Our story of forgiveness: From destruction towards peace*, <https://www.coventrycathedral.org.uk/our-story/the-story-of-coventry-cathedral>.
- 25 Elly Harrowell and Aurélie Broeckerhoff from the Centre contributed to our conference with a paper titled: ‘*Developing a framework for integrating intangible cultural heritage protection and peacebuilding*’. Unfortunately, we weren’t able to include this in the publication, but you can find out more about their work on the website of the *Centre for Peace and Security at Coventry University*: <https://www.coventry.ac.uk/research/research-directories/current-projects/2019/on-our-land/>.
- 26 Further information about the *Coventry Association for International Friendship* is available at: <https://caifonline.com/>.
- 27 Thomas Will, notes to introductory remarks to the panel discussion.
- 28 Gerhard Vinken op. cit.
- 29 Willy Brandt, *Regierungserklärung vor dem Deutschen Bundestag* [Government statement to the German Bundestag], Bonn 28 October 1969, <https://www.willy-brandt-biografie.de/quellen/bedeutende-reden/regierungserklaerung-vor-dem-bundestag-in-bonn-28-oktober-1969/>. p.2



HERITAGE AND THE PUBLIC GOOD

Loss, Memory and New Beginnings

Coventry and its Democratic Built Heritage

MICHAEL GRASS

ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

Erst mit der Fertigstellung der innerstädtischen Ringstraße von Coventry im Jahr 1974 galt der Wiederaufbau des Stadtzentrums als abgeschlossen. Mehr als dreißig Jahre zuvor hatte die deutsche Luftwaffe das historische Zentrum der Stadt in Schutt und Asche gelegt. Der Wiederaufbau von Coventry ist ein einzigartiges Beispiel für einen vorbildlichen Umgang mit der Kriegszerstörung. Verantwortungsbewusst Planende gestalteten eine Stadt, die aufgrund des industriellen Wachstums mit sozialen und infrastrukturellen Problemen belastet war, nach modernen und sozialreformerischen Grundsätzen neu. So wurde das Stadtbild von Coventry zu einer sichtbaren Manifestation demokratischer Werte wie soziale Gerechtigkeit und Teilhabe. Die Architektur brachte zum Ausdruck, dass die Stadt und das Land trotz der verheerenden Kriegszerstörungen den Neuanfang als Chance betrachtete und einen positiven Zukunftsentwurf für die Gesellschaft wagte.

In diesem Beitrag wird hervorgehoben, dass die Architektur von Coventry eine demokratische Idee verkörpern sollte, die die Grundlage für das Wiederaufbauprogramm der Stadt bildete. In der Tat ist die Nachkriegsarchitektur von Coventry ein demokratisches Erbe *avant la lettre*, da die Architektur der Stadt als Metapher gelesen werden muss: durch die Wiedergeburt der Stadt wurden auch die sozialen Beziehungen demokratisch erneuert.

SUMMARY

Only with the completion of Coventry's inner-city ring road in 1974, the rebuilding of the city centre was considered as finished. More than thirty years ago, the German *Luftwaffe* had reduced the city's historic centre to rubble. Coventry's rebuilding is a unique example of a progressive approach to wartime destruction. Responsible planners redesigned a city – burdened with social and infrastructural problems due to industrial growth – according to modern and social reform principles. Thus, Coventry's townscape sports visual manifestations of democratic values such as social justice, welfare, and participation. The architecture expressed that, indeed, the social fabric of both the city and country could emerge from wartime devastation strengthened, enlightened, and somewhat redeemed.

This paper emphasises that Coventry's architecture was intended to embody a democratic idea as the basis for the city's rebuilding programme. The task of this text is to strengthen the perspective on heritage and democracy as it unfolds, between built heritage made by democratic initiatives or heritage made to display democratic values. In fact, Coventry's post-war architecture is democratic heritage *avant la lettre*, as the city's architecture must be read as a metaphor: through the rebirth of the city, its social relations were also democratically renewed.

Introduction –

Democracy and Critical Heritage Studies

As the impact of globalisation elicits new forms of separation and belonging by appealing to a distinct cultural heritage, researchers of cultural heritage have turned to describing these scenarios within a framework of questions concerning the interplay of identity, community and memory.¹ In 2005, the Faro Convention by the Council of Europe had already highlighted the value of cultural heritage for the community and for democratic societies.² Its principles are reflected in a variety of initiatives that promote historic sites and cultural heritage as *social capital* as well as for public participation. Nevertheless, this also increases the scope for interpretation and thus opens up new possibilities for exploiting cultural heritage for political and ideological narratives. Therefore, the last two decades have seen a notable increase in the number of conferences and publications that critically revise memory politics and heritage policies. Recent studies have thus contributed to an analysis of the symbiotic relationship between cultural heritage, fostered local identities, and global politics.³ Cultural heritage, understood by social anthropologists as material artefacts such as buildings, memorials, and everyday objects, but also intangible goods such as songs, rituals, and other elements of symbolic order, is thus deliberately exploited to create a sense of community that serves the legitimisation of current political narratives as well as economic interests. Cultural studies have also emphasised that the character of a place does not derive from the place itself but is instead the result of an ongoing process of transformation, migration, and determination of various meanings.⁴ In other words, cultural objects are made to fit and to symbolise societal and political narratives.

Academic communities concerned with the analysis of modern reconstruction tend to approve narratives that foreground democratic values such as social justice, anti-authoritarianism, peace, humanism, participation, and accessibility. Nevertheless, within heritage preservation theories, the distinction between built democratic heritage and democratically built memory has been largely ignored. Heritage studies have only recently started to participate in research discourses on the democratisation of memory and built heritage. A key element in this regard is that official state agents of heritage conservation understand themselves first and foremost as preservers of a local and national built – or at least

nationally defined – heritage. Thus, their legitimacy is derived directly from the mandate of the current and democratically elected government. In Western and European countries, most heritage concepts are explicitly democratic in approach, and appeal to a national audience in providing models for the legitimisation of current historiography. But this also implies that even obvious implications of public interaction or critiques of the state's sovereignty over defining heritage go unmentioned, are hidden, concealed, or even sometimes deliberately 'written out' of history. In summary, the methodological approach needs to consider that a discussion of democratic cultural and built heritage unfolds between *democratic sites of memory* on the one hand, and *sites of democratic memory* on the other. Critical heritage studies must ensure that the discussion of nationally defined democratic heritage provides scope to identify heritage conceptions that deviate from democratic values, even if the political system is legitimised through democratic processes. Challenging heritage regimes⁵ and "democratising heritage by consciously rejecting elite cultural narratives and embracing the heritage insights of people, communities and cultures that have traditionally been marginalised in formulating heritage policy"⁶ is considered one of the primary assignments of critical heritage studies and can therefore be applied to an investigation of transnational activities that resulted in shared architectural visions as well as in collectively created sites of democratic memory in post-war Europe.

Post-War Coventry

Coventry's post-war rebuilding is of great symbolic significance. Like no other British city, it combines the idea of urban reconstruction with that of democratic social renewal. Therefore, it is not only the testbed that invented the structure and organisation of post-war rebuilding in Britain. It is also the key to understanding the images and the metaphors that were created by the architecture of that era. Ultimately, this points to the real value of the rebuilding of Coventry as a social, political, and aesthetic endeavour. It is more than a mere rebuilding of the urban scape. Instead, it captures the essence of reconstruction as a process of solving fundamental urban challenges of the era for a lasting change.

Visually, the reconstruction model corresponded to the juxtaposition of medieval and modern architecture, through a reimagined townscape that celebrated the rebirth of the city from the ruins of

the war. The rebuilding of St Michael's Cathedral is particularly effective in this regard. The building, designed by Basil Spence (1907–1976), incorporates the ruins of the mediaeval cathedral destroyed in the war. The remains of the old cathedral were to indicate the loss caused by the destructive powers of war, while the new building was to express the triumph of rebirth. However, on closer inspection, old and new seem inextricably linked – not just by construction, but also metaphorically. The co-existence of old and new parts has been significantly converted into a dialogic, even dialectic, relationship that stages and reinvents Coventry's dramatic history.

At the beginning of the 20th century, the city was plagued by a number of structural problems resulting from hyper-accelerated industrialisation and associated social injustices. There was a deficit of adequate housing and welfare facilities. Roads and sewage systems remained at pre-industrial levels. The mass of workers lacked appropriate community facilities and were challenged by insufficient structures for self-determination and social participation. The serious deficiency in the urban structure, the economic decline after the First World War, and growing social problems caused a profound change in city politics: The newly elected city council, led by the (at that time socialist) Labour Party, sought to address these problems by appointing Donald Gibson (1908–1991), a young, radically modern member of the MARS (Modern Architectural Research) Group (Britain's wing of CIAM: Congrès Internationaux d'Architecture Moderne / International Congresses of Modern Architecture) to the newly created position of City Architect. Gibson's vision involved transforming the overcrowded and outdated city into a *working-class utopia* clearly rooted in modern urban planning principles, as documented through the *Athens Charter*. His first proposal (1939) envisaged the almost complete dismantling of the medieval city structure in favour of a city centre that offered open public areas, space for recreation, cultural, community, and civic institutions. Led by his principle that "human needs must be the starting point for good architecture and town planning",⁷ Gibson's first attempt antedates the programmatic of *CIAM No. 8* (1951) on *The Heart of the City – Towards the Humanisation of Urban Life*.⁸ The planning material was adapted multiple times according to the need to rebuild Coventry after German air raids destroyed much of the city in November 1940, April 1941, and August 1942. Simi-

larl to many architects and planners at the time, Gibson recognised the destruction as an opportunity to break with historical urban planning patterns. The possibility of the *tabula rasa* – the new beginning on a blank surface – encouraged many architects.⁹ Gibson identified the core task of urban planning as "a generous organic and functional renovation."¹⁰ By contrast, the end of World War II also expedited a longing to regain historical continuity. Described by Esther Charlesworth as the *facsimile method*, the historicist reconstruction of lost architectural ensembles and historic city centres¹¹ is exemplified, among others, by Warsaw's Old Town, Rothenburg ob der Tauber, and the Dutch town of Middelburg. The approach aims to abolish the historic ruptures embraced by modernists. The polarity among *tabula rasa* and *facsimile* is deliberately resolved in only a few cities. Instead of either/or, a simultaneity emerges from the reconstruction of historic buildings combined with radical rebuilding; Coventry is one such city. During the bombings of November 1940, Donald Gibson recognised his chance to re-propose his city vision, which was previously put on hold. Nevertheless, the rebuilt Coventry of today differs from the 1940 image of *Coventry of Tomorrow*. The revisited plans re-integrated historic buildings that Gibson had rendered worthless and marked for demolition to make way for his architectural utopia.

The Blitz of November 1940 destroyed most buildings in inner-city Coventry. The catastrophic situation presented the opportunity to implement plans for modern redevelopment of the city. In this regard, the erection of Coventry's modern inner-city buildings between the 1950s and 1970s could be read as an alternative to the *facsimile* reconstruction of old houses. It is necessary to stress that this antagonistic juxtaposition of old and new is only partially justified by local planning ideas. Rather, old and new emerge as a delicate and dialogic post-war composition. Gibson's appointment as *City Architect* responsible for radical urban renewal, and subsequently chief planner of post-war reconstruction, is decisive here – and somewhat ironic in retrospect. Because in Coventry, the person in charge of the reconstruction, that is Gibson, would still have given the main stock of medieval structures over to demolition without consideration in 1939/1940. After the Blitz, however, he was endowed with the responsibility of both rebuilding and renewal of the inner city at the same time. Consequently, public discourse forced him to reconsider the historic heritage of Coventry

as important assets in the context of post-war nostalgia and assertion of urban identity. It was the experience of local wartime destruction that contributed to an awareness on Gibson's part, concerning the usefulness of a dialogue between historical and modern buildings.

Gibson's major project remained the reorganisation of the built urban context, constituting no less than the reorganisation of urban life itself. As a consequence, Coventry's city centre was designed as the central area for consumption, culture, and administration, to meet general modern ideas of the city centre. Strict separation of car traffic and urban areas reserved for pedestrians became the main feature of the plan.¹² Correspondingly, Gibson subjected the city centre to a revision of traffic routes. The planning approach here favoured a radial road system and the creation of a ring highway. At the same time, attention was paid from the outset to the need for more parking facilities.¹³ Construction of the Ring Road finally started in 1962. In addition to the shopping precinct, which takes up almost a third of the entire city centre, the Ring Road became the most important project in the reconstruction phase.

The shopping precinct built by Gibson has become a project of some historical significance. It was the first post-war building project completed in Coventry. Opened in 1955, it was also the first building complex of this type and size in Great Britain.¹⁴ The Precinct is an urban dominant of inner-city Coventry. Its facade design, the use of red bricks, and cubic shape determined the design of other buildings at the time in Coventry, the most important example in this context being the Herbert Art Gallery (1959). The precinct complex has a cruciform structure with skyscrapers accentuating the end of each branch. The tower of the famous St Michael's Cathedral is used as the eastern reference point for the precinct's central axis. The passageway begins at Broadgate and is framed by two five-storey buildings that open up into a wider inner district. The buildings in the inner yard area of the shopping precinct are kept low, and the yard is framed by an arcade that opens up space for a gallery and additional shops on the second floor. The appearance of the buildings is unified by the shared use of brick masonry, and the size and arrangement of windows, stairs, and balconies.

Architectural criticism was voiced particularly for the lack of radicalism in the designs.¹⁵ In this regard, the Precinct is a continuation of traditional strands and a translation of historical sources

of the same construction task into a more modern presence. References can be made to the Royal Exchange in London or the shopping rows in Chester. The use of traditional building materials such as brick references local building traditions dating from the 19th to early 20th century. Increasingly radical divergence from traditional lines of architectural development occurred when Arthur Ling (1913–1995) succeeded Gibson as City Architect shortly after completion of the Precinct in 1955. Ling was largely responsible for the construction of the Belgrade Theatre, a building much clearer in its facade design when compared to the Precinct – dispensing with brick masonry in favour of exposed concrete and glass. Nevertheless, Coventry's train station (1962) was the only modern building from this urban construction phase to gain heritage listing up to 2018 and to be more widely considered beyond the city as one of the most notable designs of the era.¹⁶ The station was constructed as one huge concrete slab spanning tracks, platforms, and entrance area. Set on concrete columns with no load-bearing walls, it provided for a facade made almost completely of large glass surfaces.

However, it is not so much the individual building projects that are characteristic of Gibson's planning, but the composition and relation of different architectures to each other. According to Gibson's planning ideas, the inner city is segregated and zoned into functional spheres: the cathedral district, university, shopping, recreation, and administration.¹⁷ However, the independent urban landscapes or zones so created were designed to communicate visually with each other. The university is situated east of the cathedral, sporting an inner-city campus with a main building and several faculty institutions. Gibson had a similar intention when planning the layout of city administration buildings, which form a collection of various buildings in the southern inner-city area. The Council House remained the main site of the city administration, followed by individual buildings, each with different urban administrative areas, acting "rather like a University Campus."¹⁸

The locations of individual buildings in this constructed townscape should not be misconstrued as coincidental or merely pragmatic. Likewise, the buildings preserved were not simply the ones least damaged (on the contrary: Gibson's urban planning is accused of having destroyed more historic buildings than the Nazi bombs).¹⁹ Yet, although his pre-war redevelopment plan would have sacrificed

prominent historic buildings, there was no escape from rebuilding some famous objects after the enormous level of destruction experienced in the war. As reminders of a national history continued, attention was focussed on preserving such *keepers of the past*. Speaking for the many, architect Philip Boughton Chatwin thus noted in 1946: “Coventry without Ford’s Hospital is unthinkable.”²⁰

The city map reveals a regular arrangement of the buildings. In addition, the arrangement of individual buildings and ensembles of mediaeval timbered houses forms a repeating pattern when walking the city. Visual axes and significant views were composed towards historic architectures and linked to the presence of medieval buildings. The constant correspondence between old and new architecture resulting from this careful composition overcomes the apparent antagonism between the two. Instead of *facsimile* or *tabula rasa*, Coventry’s urban ensem-

ble is an example of a functioning and readable juxtaposition of both architectures (Figs. 1 and 2).

Towards a Heritage of Democratic Coventry

Coventry’s post-war townscape figuratively orchestrates the dialogue between the past and the future of the city. The symbolism of post-war modernism expressed war remembrance, the overcoming of loss and destruction, but also stages the democratic rebirth of city and society. The deliberate composition and juxtaposition of historical and modern buildings constitutes the relationship between the old and the new. Visual axes underline the dialectical dependence of past and present. The arrangement of historical urban landscapes offers a tangible city history that on the one hand has been destroyed, but on the other hand was overcome by modern planning. Nevertheless the musealisation of the city’s history – either in the form of so-called *islands of the past*, as

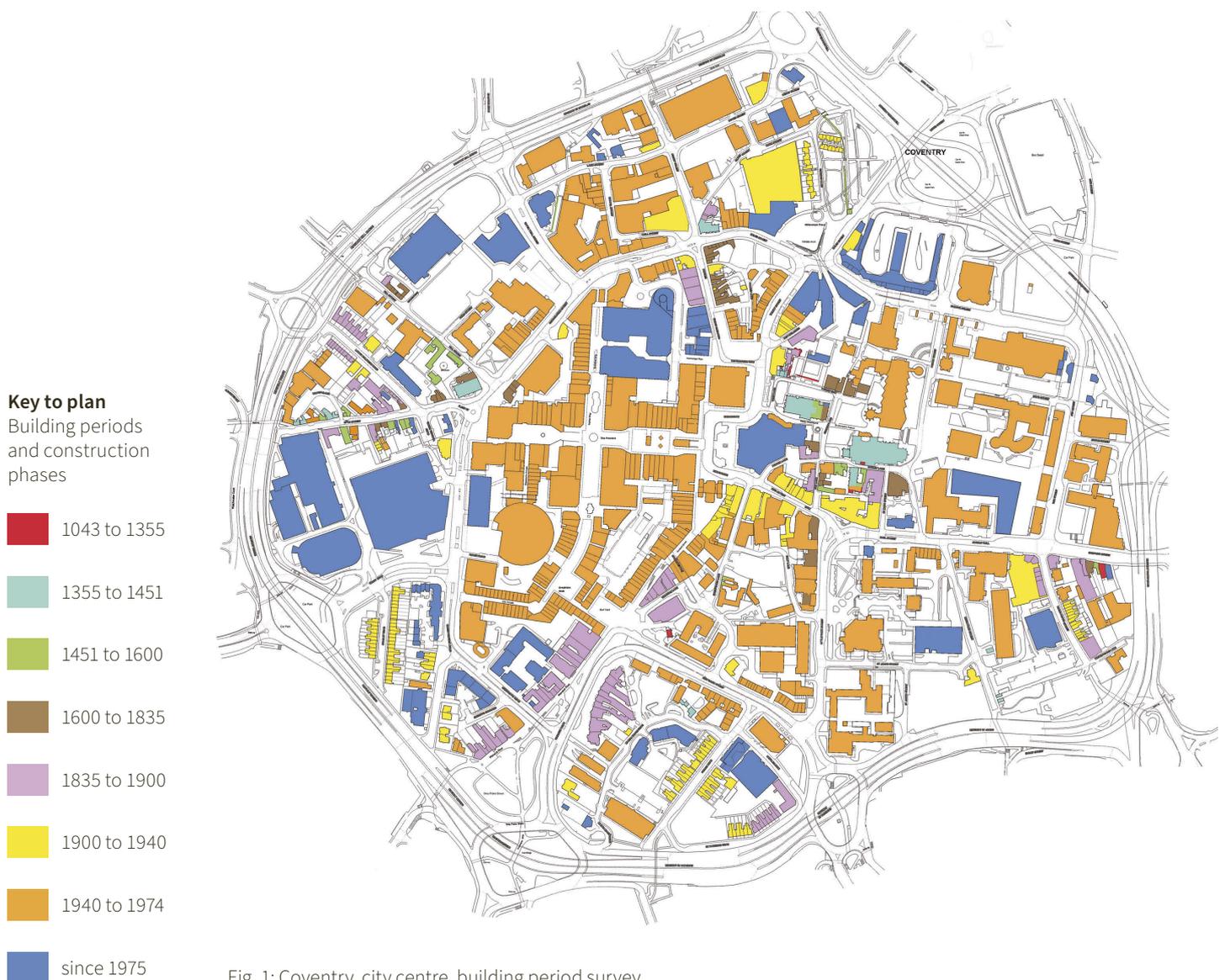


Fig. 1: Coventry, city centre, building period survey.

inner-city open-air museums, or as preserved ruins – is not unique to Coventry but common to rebuilt cities across Europe. Showcasing an often-idealised past, it offers both to stage loss and to emphasise the democratic foundations of the modern city. By contrast, as if *building tomorrow* had become the ultimate purpose of the war, the architecture of the reconstruction era embodies the utopia of modern society. The democratic aspect is displayed throughout Coventry. It is pragmatic, technical, spacious, and permits equal access to light, air, and all the amenities of the post-war culture. It offers the prospect of social justice and communal welfare.

However, the preceding paragraphs also make clear that the notion of democratic reconstruction of the war-torn city was not an original concern of Gibson’s urban renewal. Understandably, the task of transforming the unusable city in accordance with modern social and political concerns arose from new-

ly defined democratic demands of the urban society in the years before the Second World War. In order to meet these demands, Gibson made his planning ideas available to public discourse via open exhibitions, pamphlets, and publications. The city’s cultural and democratic heritage is therefore also defined by the unprecedented effort that Gibson and his planning staff made to balance public calls for conservation and well-intended but unpopular renewal prospects.

Nevertheless, the rebuilt Coventry is a powerful symbol of the democratisation of urban architecture and the search for social participation and acceptance in the city. The layout offers an urban experience that is mainly influenced by the idea of flattening hierarchies in conventional urban structures. Instead of the car-friendly city, Gibson’s focus is on accessibility, user-friendliness, short distances, and easy access to public, cultural, and civic amenities. The permanent social participation and the transparency of the

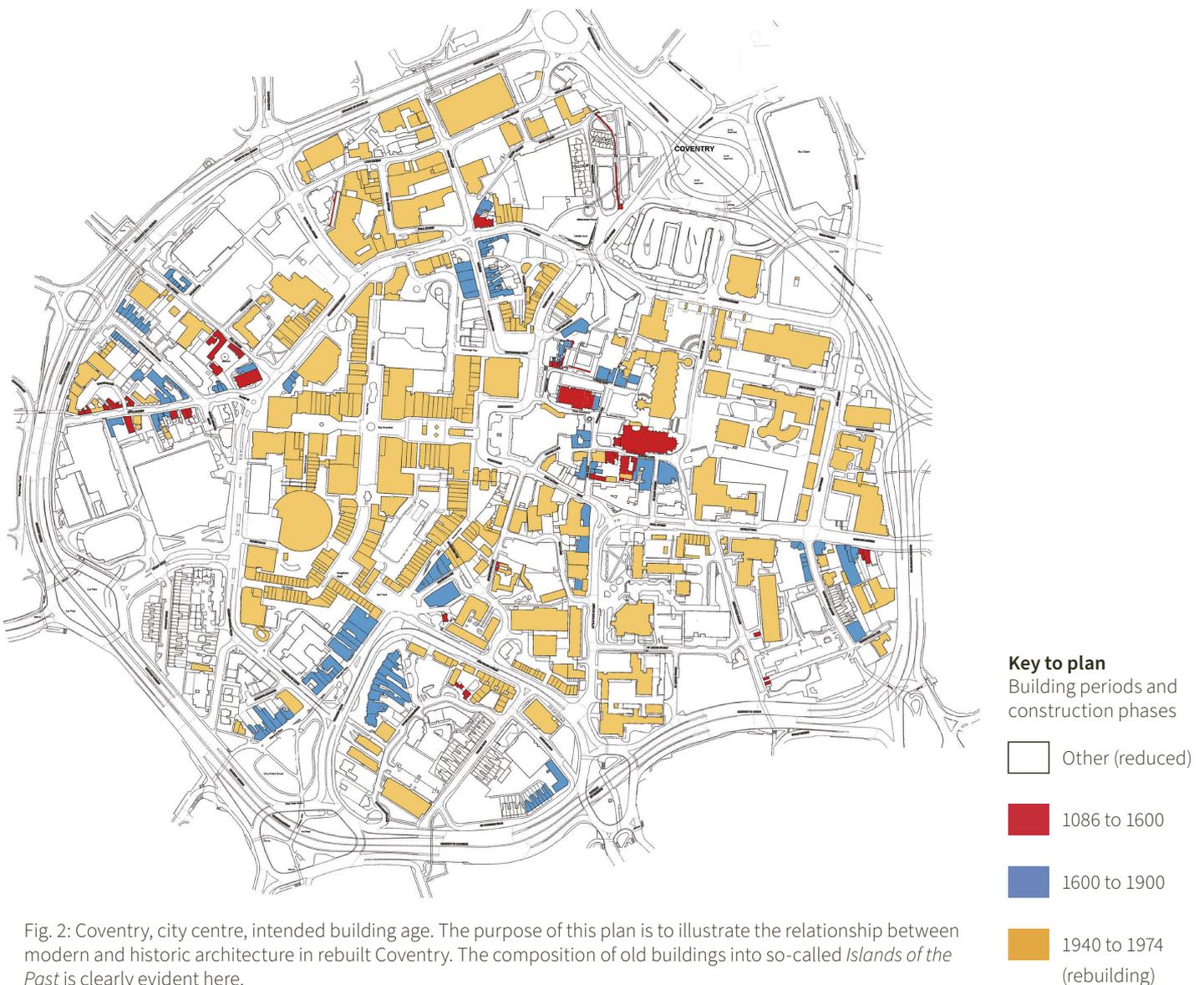


Fig. 2: Coventry, city centre, intended building age. The purpose of this plan is to illustrate the relationship between modern and historic architecture in rebuilt Coventry. The composition of old buildings into so-called *Islands of the Past* is clearly evident here.

planning considerations are evidence of the intention to make the planning process itself an act of democratic and collective agency. His first proposal was made available to the public and deliberately subjected to public discourse and participation. The plans were presented in an open space exhibition named *Coventry of Tomorrow – Towards a Beautiful City*, held over one week in 6–13 May 1940, pre-dating the World War II bombings. The repeated revisions of the proposal culminated in a second exhibition in October 1945, entitled *Coventry of the Future*. The first exhibition in 1940 was clearly titled to emphasise the intellectual link between Coventry planners and Le Corbusier's *City of Tomorrow* (1929), whereas *Coventry of the Future* reveals a newfound assertiveness and formulated an individual planning approach that emancipated itself from Corbusian paradigms. Gibson's shift away from the often-authoritarian attitude of modern architects and urban planners actually seems to be the most important achievement of his rebuilding process. The visual manifestation of the public discourse provides the perfect scope to discuss the City as presenting among the most tangible evidence of a post-war democratic agenda.

Conclusion: Devaluation and Revaluation

In a 1967 episode of the famous British TV show *The Avengers*, a hostile communist nation built a clandestine underground city on British territory. The city, located in a collapsed mine, was intended to serve as an infiltration base, supporting their army until it was ready to stage the final invasion of England. The city's appearance is most remarkable, featuring modern-style buildings, pedestrian areas, balconies, and the typical homogeneity of modern architecture. Although staged on a film set, this fictional, idealised socialist city referred to a real existing prototype – one located neither in the Soviet Union, nor any other state of the Eastern Bloc. Instead, the scenery was modelled after Coventry's inner-city shopping precinct, and cited the prominent view towards the destroyed spire of Coventry Cathedral.

The aforementioned example is just one of many that illustrate the challenges that Coventry's post-war architecture has been facing. During the second half of the 20th century, conservative political forces in particular sought to discredit the achievements of modern urban planning. The formal and aesthetic results were consistently used to delegitimise the social contexts and motivations behind the renewal, claiming them to be undemocratic or even socialist.

This constant devaluation process erased the democratic merits of Coventry's reconstruction plans from the city's consciousness, if not architectural history altogether. It is the task of heritage conservation to unearth these contextual layers with regard to democracy and cultural heritage.

The city of Coventry provides one of the most telling examples of how democratic values are visualised through architecture, how those narratives came to be reviled, and how they were transformed back into democratic heritage. The rebuilding of Coventry is a unique example of progressive approaches to addressing wartime destruction. Essentially, the post-war cityscape conveys two main notions of rebuilding. On the one hand, the city was burdened by industrial growth, especially around the turn of the 20th century, which deepened social and infrastructural problems. As such, the urban fabric needed redesigning from the perspective of realising social reforms. On the other hand, specific urban landscapes were created in the course of Coventry's reconstruction, in order to represent an imagined urban history. The process of architectural development after Gibson's appointment as *City Architect* in 1939, a position that put him in charge of all public building activities, is well documented and the city's post-war architectural history thoroughly researched. This is due not least to the work of the charities *English Heritage* and the *Twentieth Century Society*, raising awareness of the importance of the Coventry model for modern urban reconstruction. Attention increased from 2012 onwards, with *English Heritage* adding Coventry Cathedral to the national 'at risk' list. Surveys and campaigns to chart and publicise the heritage values of Coventry Market and the shopping precinct area followed. Finally, in 2018, Coventry's post-war shopping centre was earmarked for Grade II designation in a "rare listing move."²¹ The final listing of some heritage buildings was preceded by a comprehensive investigation into their heritage value by *Historic England*, the public body that lists UK heritage sites. The survey was commissioned as a methodological instrument to record the value of Coventry's post-war architecture and urban planning. Published in 2016, the authors concluded that the post-war reconstruction is the most important phase of the city's urban development.²² Against this backdrop, the city's rebuilding received belated recognition. We are called upon to ensure that its democratic principles are also allowed to survive.

Figures

1, 2 Michael Grass 2024

Endnotes

- 1 Examples include the work of the DFG Research Training Group 2227 *Identity and Heritage* at the Technical University of Berlin, the Bauhaus University Weimar, the Anhalt University of Applied Sciences Dessau, and the Erfurt University of Applied Sciences, which is dedicated to the critical research of identity and heritage constructions that weigh on buildings and historical sites. Among the ground-breaking works are the research by Tuuli Lähdesmäki, for example: *Managing War Heritage in the European Union*, in: Ihab Saloul and Britt Baillie (Eds.), *The Palgrave Encyclopedia of Cultural Heritage and Conflict*, Cham 2024, p. 1–13; *Heritage Diplomacy: Discourses, Imaginaries and Practices of Heritage and Power* (co-edited with Viktorija Ceginskas), Abingdon 2024; *Constructing Social Europe through European Cultural Heritage*, in: *European Societies* 23 (2021) No. 5, p. 1–26; and, especially in the German context, the research by Anne Fuchs, for example: *After the Dresden Bombing: Pathways of Memory, 1945 to the Present, Basingstoke, Houndmills 2012*; *Debating German Cultural Identity since 1989* (co-edited with Kathleen James-Chakraborty and Linda Shortt), Rochester 2011.
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- 3 Robert S. Peckham (Ed.), *Rethinking heritage: Cultures and politics in Europe*, London 2003.
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- 13 Junichi Hasegawa, *Replanning the Blitzed City Centre. A Comparative Study of Bristol, Coventry and Southampton 1941–1950*, Buckingham/New York 1992, p. 250; George Demidowicz, *A Guide to the Buildings of Coventry*, Cheltenham 2003, p. 108–109.
- 14 Association of Critical Heritage Studies (See note 9).
- 15 Coventry City Council, *Listed Buildings*, 17/10018.
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- 17 Ibid., p. 40.
- 18 Peckham 2003 (See note 4).
- 19 As Donald Gibson emphasised in March 1984, cf. Sarah Walford, *Architecture in Tension. An Examination of the Position of the Architect in the Private and Public Sectors, Focusing on the Training and Careers of Sir Basil Spence (1907–1976) and Sir Donald Gibson (1908–1991)*, PhD thesis, Warwick 2009, p. 165.
- 20 Scharoun 1946 (See note 10), p. 3.
- 21 Gould & Gould 2016 (see note 13), p. 117–128.
- 22 Demidowicz and Singlehurst 2000 (See note 12); Those features are also described by Gibson's successor, Arthur Ling 1959 (See note 12).

Public Value and Architectural Heritage in Post-Soviet Kazakhstan

TEMIRLAN NURPEISSOV

ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

Seit der Erlangung der Unabhängigkeit nach der Auflösung der UdSSR im Jahr 1991 hat Kasachstan den Weg zur Demokratie eingeschlagen und dabei bedeutende politische, sozioökonomische und demographische Veränderungen durchlaufen. Zu diesen Veränderungen gehörte auch die Schaffung eines neuen Rechtsrahmens für den Schutz des kulturellen Erbes. Ein System wurde geschaffen, um historische und kulturelle Denkmäler durch wichtige Gesetze und Richtlinien umfassend zu schützen.

In der Praxis wurde jedoch häufig der Erhaltung der weiter zurückliegenden Geschichte und des architektonischen Erbes Vorrang eingeräumt, so dass Denkmäler aus der russischen Kaiser- und Sowjetzeit dem unerlaubten Abriss, der Vernachlässigung und der radikalen Renovierung zum Opfer fielen. In den letzten drei Jahrzehnten wurden zahlreiche architektonische Wahrzeichen in ganz Almaty in Mitleidenschaft gezogen, darunter das denkmalgeschützte „VIP-Terminal“ des internationalen Flughafens Almaty (1947; 2022 abgerissen) und der Palast der Republik (1970). Diese beispiellosen städtebaulichen Veränderungen haben den Unmut der Öffentlichkeit über die Erhaltung des kulturellen Erbes in Kasachstan geweckt und zur Gründung mehrerer Nichtregierungsinitiativen geführt, die das Bewusstsein für das Schicksal des architektonischen Erbes des Landes schärfen sollen.

In diesem Beitrag wird untersucht, welche Rolle die Öffentlichkeit in den Diskursen und Praktiken der Verwaltung des kulturellen Erbes in Kasachstan spielt. Es wird auch erörtert, ob die Beteiligung der Öffentlichkeit dazu beitragen kann, ein stärkeres Gefühl der Demokratie in dem Land zu entwickeln, das sich vom sowjetischen System löst. Darüber hinaus wird die enge Verbindung zwischen dem Schutz des Kulturerbes und der Förderung der Demokratie in Kasachstan thematisiert und die bedeutende Rolle hervorgehoben, die die sowjetische Architektur bei der Stärkung dieser Beziehung in den letzten Jahren gespielt hat.

ABSTRACT

Since gaining independence following the dissolution of the USSR in 1991, Kazakhstan has embarked on a path towards democracy, undergoing significant political, socio-economic, and demographic changes. These changes included the establishment of a new legislative framework for the protection of cultural heritage. This complex system was set up to comprehensively protect historical and cultural monuments through key laws and numerous regulatory documents. In practice, however, priority has often been given to the preservation of more distant history and architectural heritage, leaving monuments from the Russian Imperial and Soviet periods vulnerable to unauthorised demolition, neglect and radical renovation. Over the past three decades, numerous architectural landmarks across Almaty, such as the listed “VIP Terminal” of Almaty International Airport (1947; demolished 2022) and the Palace of the Republic (1970), have been impacted. These unprecedented urban transformations have sparked public discontent regarding heritage conservation in Kazakhstan, leading to the establishment of several non-governmental initiatives to raise awareness about the fate of the country’s architectural legacy. This paper will analyse the role that public plays in the discourses and practices of cultural heritage management in Kazakhstan. It will also discuss whether public participation can help to develop a stronger sense of democracy in the country as it transitions from the Soviet system. Furthermore, it will address the strong connection between heritage protection and the advancement of democracy in Kazakhstan, highlighting the significant role that Soviet architecture has played in strengthening this relationship in recent years.

Monuments of Undemocratic Past

At the mention of its name, Kazakhstan is often affiliated with neighbouring Central Asian states (the *-stans*), while its Socialist past remains less outward. The names Soviet Union and Russia are certainly used interchangeably in both conversational and academic contexts, as the historical connection with the other 14 union republics, including Kazakhstan, may not be apparent. The strong link between Russia and Kazakhstan dates to the first imperial military presence in the country's territory in the 18th century. By the end of the 19th century, most territory that constitutes Kazakhstan today was effectively controlled by Russian imperial forces. Following the October 1917 Revolution in Russia, Kazakhstan became a part of the emergent Socialist Bloc. The Soviet period profoundly affected Kazakhstan's development, shaping the country's politics, economy and demographics. At an urban scale, the 20th-century architectural layer remains dominant across most of the country's cities, the growth of which was steered by the development-driven political will of the Communist Party.

The country's incredibly rapid growth was widely publicised, including in posters, banners and through slogans crowning prominent buildings. Persistent Soviet propaganda deeply ingrained as unquestionable achievements and success of the Great October Revolution. In her doctoral thesis of 1965 focusing on Soviet Kazakhstan, Marija Šaumjan stated that the Revolution "for the first time liberated previously oppressed peoples from national-colonial oppression and opened to them the path of great progress".¹ With limited freedom to question and discuss official rhetoric, many praised the supposed Soviet achievement of bringing people equal wealth and prosperity. However, little was told about the real cost of the Soviet miracle, paid by the people of its federated republics. The dark side of this history remained concealed.

For Kazakhstan and many other Union Republics, the formation of the Soviet Union was accompanied by utmost cruelty, suppression, and displacement, abandoning core democratic principles. Known as *dekulakisation*, the campaign to systematically eradicate "wealthy" peasants (kulaks) in pursuit of socialist equality was marked by unforgiving violence, with deportations and death sentences deemed appropriate means of achieving this equality. The sedentarisation of nomads was considered a great leap from archaism to Socialism, deep-

ly praised in Soviet history.² However, the process forced steppe dwellers to abandon their traditional nomadic pastoralism, leading to a famine known as the *Asharshylyk*. In just two years, between 1931 and 1933, the famine claimed the lives of approximately 1.5 million people, while another one million fled the country.³ Displacement and repression continued beyond the first years of the Soviet system. A part of the GULAG system, *Karlag* (Karaganda Corrective Labour Camp) was one of the largest corrective labour camps in the USSR, operating from 1930 to 1959 in the Karaganda region, central Kazakhstan. The exploitation of unpaid inmate labour played a significant role in the Union's coal and steel production. The camp output greatly impacted the development of agriculture, industry and Kazakhstan's primary infrastructure. The undisputed growth and striking progress thus are intrinsically tied to the traumatic early Soviet history, making the Soviet heritage contested.

Architecture played a significant role in building up and promoting the Soviet regime. Beyond decorative building elements that often took the shape of sophisticated reliefs and sgraffiti, architectural objects were built as testimonies to the achievements of the Soviet people and the Party. Capitals and prominent cities across the Union were models for demonstrating advancement and setting aspirational goals for the whole nation. By the decree of the *Kazakhstani Soviet Socialist Republic Central Executive Committee and the Council of People's Commissars* on 3 April 1927, Almaty, back then known as Alma-Ata, became the capital of Soviet Kazakhstan, and by this, the country's administrative, industrial and cultural centre.⁴ In the following years, Almaty served as the test ground for some of the most daring projects in the Soviet Union.⁵ Distinctive and experimental in character, these projects were rapidly listed as historical and architectural monuments, commemorating and praising both technological advancement and the ingenuity of the national masters.

One prominent example from the Kazakhstani School of Architecture is the Lenin Palace, today known as the Palace of the Republic. The history of the building offers insight into the contestation of Soviet Architecture in Kazakhstan today. Architect Nikolaj Ripinskij, the co-author of the Palace project, was one amongst many who fell victim to Stalinist repressions and was forced to relocate to Kazakhstan.⁶ Despite his arrest on espionage allegations and

his deportation from Moscow⁷, Ripinskij designed other notable objects in Almaty, significantly contributing to the formation of the Kazakh National School of Architecture. Constructed in 1970 and included in the State List of Monuments of History and Culture in 1982⁸, the Palace of the Republic was radically remodelled in 2010, leading to the irrevocable loss of its original qualities, authenticity and historical relevance (Figs. 1 and 2).⁹ Inevitably, the recent interventions raise questions about the legitimacy of the action within the contemporary legal framework for heritage protection and the value of such prominent examples of Socialist architecture in post-Soviet Kazakhstan.

Winds of Change

Embarking on its path to constructing a democratic society in 1991, Kazakhstan faced numerous challenges, including the need to replace the obsolete Soviet legal framework. Overall, this change has been slow and gradual, with some regulatory documents still relying on the earlier Soviet structures and terminology. Notably, one of the first documents to be

adopted was the 1992 law on the protection and use of historical and cultural heritage objects (1992 Heritage Law). It replaced the 1978 KazSSR law on the protection and use of historical and cultural monuments, which was conceptualised by the Soviet system. The Soviet law operated with definitions that went in hand with the patriotic ideology, whereas monuments of history were defined as “buildings, constructions [...] connected [...] with the Great October Socialist Revolution, the civil and the Great Patriotic War, the socialist and the communist developments, [...] with the lives of outstanding statesmen and politicians, national heroes, famous scientists, artists”. Instinctively, the 1992 Heritage Law established new classifications and definitions of heritage objects, resembling in its original publication those found in the 1970 and 1972 UNESCO Conventions.¹⁰ Over the years, the regulatory document underwent numerous minor and significant changes, introducing new definitions and classifications (29 editions in total). This inevitably led to contradictions in conceptualising the notion of heritage and complexifying its protection, leaving pro-



Fig. 1: Lenin Palace (renamed Palace of the Republic), F. Sal'nikov, V. Sadčikov, Alma-Ata, CGA KFDZ Almaty (archive logo upper right corner) (09/29/1976).



Fig. 2: Palace of the Republic after the 2010 remodelling, Almaty, Temirlan Nurpeissov, (02/28/2021).

professionals perplexed by the status of relevant objects and mechanisms to protect them.¹¹ The 2019 law on the protection and use of historical and cultural heritage objects (2019 Heritage Law) finally replaced the 1992 document, and the newly introduced law, interestingly, combined terminology from the UNESCO documents and current Russian legislation, in addition to structural references to the preceding Soviet legislation.

In architectural practice, the socio-political and economic restructuring that accompanied Kazakhstan's independence directly impacted the built environment. In the first decade, the effort was directed toward building adaptation, stimulated by significant demand for updating the functionality and appearance of Soviet buildings. Designers relied on speedy and affordable methods, such as new glazing or metal façade panels, alongside rapidly applied interior finishes.¹² From the turn of the millennium onward, new construction in the residential and commercial sectors occasionally occurred through demolition.¹³ This nationwide urban refurbishment process also affected listed architectural monuments to a great extent.¹⁴ In Almaty, an extensive list of impacted objects includes Hotel Almaty (constructed in 1967 as Hotel Alma-Ata, remodelled in 2002¹⁵ and 2014),¹⁶

Hotel Medeo (constructed in 1975, demolished in 2007),¹⁷ the Arman cinema complex (constructed in 1968, remodelled in 2015, additional volumes in 2015) (Figs. 3 and 4),¹⁸ as well as the previously mentioned Palace of the Republic. Hasty architectural alterations led to sudden and radical changes to the previously uniform Soviet ensembles, which were then concealed behind a new layer.

It is possible to hypothesise that the shortcomings and perplexities in the heritage conservation legal framework, starting from their ever-changing definitions of monuments, led to the sporadic, virtually uncontrollable alterations to listed objects. Simultaneously, the problem of definitions is not only terminological but is also linked to divergent opinions of what constitutes heritage. Some professionals refer only to medieval and temporally distant architectural objects as being in desperate need of attention,¹⁹ whereas others highlight threats to recent architectural heritage and its internationally recognised value.²⁰ Moreover, the discourse on value is self-contradictory, taking Soviet history and its colonial traces into account, which have in recent years been scrutinised by local scholars.²¹ It is, however, certain that in the three decades of Kazakhstan's independence, its Soviet architectural heritage

has been subjected to vague terminology, diverging opinions and, with increasing public awareness, conflicting values.

Democracy and Heritage

Abolishing the totalitarian regime of Soviet Socialist rule, Nursultan Nazarbayev became the republic's first president following historic democratic elections in 1991.²² However, the preceding authoritarian system could not be merely left in the past by the transition to democracy. Hence, through numerous constitutional changes and adaptations, Nazarbayev remained in power for almost three decades (until 2019) before he was replaced by the current president, Kassim-Žomart Tokajev.²³ This underlines that setting out on the new development path has proven to be a great challenge for post-Soviet Kazakhstan, and the process of building democracy continues.

Notably, recent architectural heritage and its protection play a key role in this process. In recent years, rising discontent with the irreversible loss of numerous architectural monuments due to demolition and remodelling led to the formation of several

private, professional, and conspicuously public initiatives in Almaty. *Urban Forum Kazakhstan* is a nationwide independent organisation aiming to uphold dialogue between city authorities, developers, and the public as being indispensable to the creation of a more appropriate and balanced development model for cities. In Almaty, the team conducted several studies concerning the rapidly changing urban environment and the impacts of such change on architectural heritage. Their analysis of the “crown”, a highly detailed decorative metal frame crowning the building of the Arman cinema complex, revealed a complex history of the building and its designer (Nikolaj Ripinskij).²⁴ Lost during remodelling in 2000, the decorative elements alongside the interior and exterior reliefs were genuine artworks with significance and value: they encapsulated and mirrored the spirit of the time, namely space exploration and the first human flight by Yuri Gagarin in 1961.

Similarly, the demolition of the Celinnyj cinema building was also halted due to its outstanding artistic value.²⁵ The building was completely remodelled in 2000, and the sgraffiti by Je. Sidorkin was covered behind drywall and only rediscovered in 2018. Featuring the controversial motives of an *oriental* mystical lady, the artwork, nevertheless, has great historical value and relevance, which is also recognised by the public. In turn, this indicates a certain movement towards appropriating contested Soviet heritage.

In 2016, A group of young professionals and enthusiasts at *Archcode Almaty* launched an online repository of outstanding architectural objects across the city. The project aims to draw attention to the city's architectural identity and the threats posed by recent interventions. Moreover, the team set out to engage in dialogue with various actors involved in the city's development in order to ensure the preservation of architectural heritage for future generations. Over the years, the Archcode team has documented more than a hundred buildings in a publicly available repository, including some that no longer exist. This makes the web repository and the gathered photographic material invaluable resources. However, this also highlights the vulnerability of Almaty's architectural heritage, emphasising the importance of Archcode's work.

In an attempt to prevent the imminent removal of a listed architectural object, on 9 October 2022, a small group of activists gathered in front of the



Fig. 3: Arman cinema, Alma-Ata, S. Besarabov, CGA KFDZ Almaty (archive logo upper right corner) (1962).



Fig. 4: Arman cinema complex after the remodelling showing the evident the loss of the decorative elements, Almaty, Temirlan Nurpeissov (02/28/2021).

historic Almaty airport terminal building.²⁶ The building came in the way of the airport's expansion, and the private developer had a simple solution to move the structure to a better location. The 2019 Heritage Law strictly prohibits the relocation of monuments, apart from the loss of the monument (loss of more than 70% of the original structure, allowing for the relocation of the remaining 30%) or the loss of the monument's historical or cultural relevance. Moreover, relocation can be sustained in cases where such a move improves the preservation of the object (Article 29, Paragraph 2). The 2019 Law, however, states that the central competent authority and the local executive body for heritage protection would need to produce a relocation permit. The activists claimed that the developer failed to fulfil the requirements foreseen by the law, as such permits were not issued. Nevertheless, the developer proceeded with the airport's expansion plan, relocating the listed monument to a new location. Although the relocation project included a detailed survey of the building and removal of important building and decorative elements for reuse

in the reconstruction, the lack of historical cultural expertise and the absence of the necessary permits render the relocation illegal. This further frustrates the public with the incompetence of the responsible government officials.

Although far from wide-reaching in terms of participants, the protest was unprecedented in the recent urban development of Almaty for several reasons. Firstly, representing the public, the activists also expressed that they deemed the monuments of the Soviet period valuable. The terminal building was constructed in 1947 (architects G. Jelkin and B. Zavarzin). The neoclassical building is rather a common airport construction of the Stalinist period.²⁷ In Almaty, however, it is meticulously intertwined with the imposing building and decorative elements: pointed arches and traditional Central Asian ornamentation on the façade inserts and the capitols of the columns. Found in the exteriors and interiors of buildings across Almaty, these elements became the forms of the national style.²⁸ The synthesis of the traditional culture, or its interpretation by the Russian architects, and its translation into

architecture, is another trait of the Stalinist period. Despite the possible negative association with the previous Soviet regime, the activists claimed the building was an integral part of their heritage, and they assumed the responsibility of passing it on to future generations.

Moreover, this form of activism highlights the public's preparedness for direct engagement in the country's development. The protest demonstrated the recognition of the public's constitutional right to heritage and the shared responsibility to safeguard it. Additionally, it indicated a conscious departure from the Soviet system by challenging the historically shaped top-down approach to heritage conservation. This grassroots movement also suggests a shift towards democratising heritage, paving the path to a values-based approach to conservation.²⁹

Through public activism and several non-governmental initiatives, heritage objects have come to play a central role in developing Kazakhstan's

democratic system, which should not be taken for granted. The protests and unrest that, in January 2022, briefly cut off Kazakhstan from the rest of the world (limited Internet access, grounded flights), together with the presence of Russian troops to restore peace, reminded many of the fragility of the emerging democracy.³⁰ The invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 confirmed Russia's persistent imperialism and desire for domination, which just a century ago led to devastating displacement, famine and repression in Kazakhstan, making the inherited Soviet architecture undoubtedly challenging to approach. It is, thus, of utmost interest to note that democratic awareness continues to thrive, and public input brings a fresh perspective to heritage conservation that the established system and experts have overlooked. The outcome of public involvement in heritage care remains uncertain. However, the significance of the relationship between heritage care and democracy should not be underestimated.

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Heritage and Community Wellbeing

The Capacity of Participation to Benefit Communities and its Significance for Civil Society

CARENZA LEWIS

ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

Dieser Beitrag gibt einen Überblick über Forschungsarbeiten zu den Auswirkungen der Teilhabe und des *Wellbeings* im Kontext lokaler Kulturerbediskurse. Nach einer kurzen Kontextualisierung des Fokus auf soziale Werte in Diskursen zu kulturellem Erbe, wie sie in der Faro-Konvention von 2005 befürwortet werden folgt ein Abriss des Konzepts des *Wellbeings*. Im Anschluss werden zwei neuere interdisziplinäre Forschungsarbeiten unter der Leitung der Universität Lincoln besprochen, um deren Erkenntnisse über die Auswirkungen der Teilhabe am Kulturerbe auf das *Wellbeing* der lokalen Community zu beleuchten. In der ersten Studie wurde festgestellt, dass Partizipation in direktem Zusammenhang mit den identifizierten Bedingungen für das *Wellbeing* der Gemeinschaft steht. Die zweite Studie zeigt, dass die Bedingungen, die in einer quantitativen experimentellen Psychologiestudie in den Niederlanden und im Vereinigten Königreich für einen kausalen Zusammenhang zwischen der Beteiligung am kulturellen Erbe und dem *Wellbeing* nachgewiesen wurden, auch eng mit den Bedingungen für das *Wellbeing* der Gesamtgesellschaft zusammenhängen.

Der Beitrag schließt mit der These, dass die Politik den Fokus auf die für lokalen Gemeinschaften relevanten Themen stärken muss, da hier bisher ein Mangel besteht, insbesondere angesichts rechtspopulistischer Bestrebungen Kulturerbe emotional zu adressieren und damit zu einer Spaltung beizutragen. Es wird vorgeschlagen, Partizipation zu stärken und Programme zu fördern, die hierfür sensibilisieren.

ABSTRACT

This paper reviews recent research into the impact of participation in place-based heritage activities on community wellbeing, an aspect of wellbeing that has, in the context of heritage, been less closely studied than personal wellbeing. Brief contextualisation of the present focus on the social value of heritage, as advocated by the 2005 Faro Convention, and an outline of the concept of community wellbeing are followed by reviews of two pieces of recent interdisciplinary research led by the University of Lincoln, considering the insights they offer into the impact of heritage participation on community wellbeing. In the first, nearly half the 19 categories identified as associating UK heritage participation with wellbeing are seen to relate directly to identified conditions for community wellbeing. In the second, the conditions shown by a quantitative experimental psychology study testing for (and finding) a causal relationship between heritage participation and wellbeing in the Netherlands and UK are also seen to relate closely to the conditions for community wellbeing; while later post-participation interviews showed that many of the emotional impacts also related closely to these underpinning conditions. Finally, we note the lack of substantive political interest in evidence demonstrating the capacity of heritage to support major agendas such as health and communities, and the contrastingly energetic use made of the emotional appeal of heritage by right-wing populists, which often seek to divide communities rather than bring them together. We identify four priorities for the future, including further advancing understanding of the impact of heritage participation on different communities, raising awareness of its positive impact, and a achieving step change in the numbers of programmes delivering this impact.

Introduction

Heritage is a crucial part of human collective memory and experience and an important resource for historical and scientific study. The objects, places and practices of heritage are often seen as entities that make demands on society today through their need for protection. Certainly, they are often at risk, as recognised in the *European Convention on the Protection of the Archaeological Heritage* signed in Valletta in 1992,¹ which aimed to protect Europe's archaeological heritage from threats such as construction, natural disasters and illicit excavation. Forty-six European countries have ratified this treaty,² making it almost universally recognised in heritage protection legislation across Europe. But in 2004, a focus on the value of heritage, foregrounding its importance for people, including in relation to human rights and democracy, lay at the heart of the *Council of Europe Framework Convention on the Value of Cultural Heritage for Society* signed in Faro.³ This included four key principles: everyone has the right to benefit from cultural heritage and contribute to its enrichment; communities should actively participate in heritage preservation and management; heritage should be sustainably integrated into everyday life; digital technology should enhance access to and preservation of cultural heritage.

The Faro Convention has been signed by 30 European countries, and while it remains (to date) less widely adopted than the Valletta Treaty, much progress has been made since 2005 in connecting people in Europe more closely with heritage, including through large numbers of initiatives in the UK.⁴ This activity has delivered a considerable volume of evidence for the social benefits of heritage, although its value remains most easily (and therefore most often) measured in financial terms, such as through the stimulus heritage gives to tourism. But not all trends in the perceptions and use of heritage have been positive: as “heritage practices intersect with political-economic networks and ideology”,⁵ the emotional power of heritage has been exploited for negative purposes,⁶ including in support of extremist populist, nationalist and racist ideologies.⁷

Overall, the notion of heritage as something that confers a positive, social benefit beyond the purely financial remains less widely recognised than it should be. This paper presents recent research into the relationship between heritage participation and wellbeing, focussing on community wellbeing. Picking up on Georgina Holmes-Skelton's 2019 discus-

sion of the need for clearer definitions and roles for heritage in public policy,⁸ the insights from recent research discussed in this paper invite consideration of how wider recognition of the positive impacts of heritage participation on communities could increase the capacity of heritage to deliver such benefits, and reduce its capacity to harm.

Defining Personal and Community Wellbeing

Personal wellbeing is an elusive concept with more than 180 measures identified, but broadly concerns how good we feel about our lives. Ten broad dimensions of wellbeing include the natural environment, personal wellbeing, relationships, health, what we do, where we live, our financial situation, the economy, education/skills and governance.⁹ A considerable amount of work has been carried out around the impact of heritage (including heritage participation) on personal wellbeing;¹⁰ this will not be reviewed in any more detail in this short paper focused on community wellbeing, which has hitherto received less attention.

Community wellbeing can refer to “living well together at a community scale” and/or to “the role of community-scale aspects of living on individual wellbeing”.¹¹ It is about how well-connected and well-resourced communities are, with dimensions including interpersonal relationships, social cohesion, social inclusion, social capital and community resilience.¹² Community wellbeing is affected by a “combination of social, economic, environmental, cultural, and political conditions identified by individuals and their communities as essential for them to flourish and fulfil their potential”.¹³

In brief summary, five key factors underpin and impact community wellbeing.¹⁴ First, relationships with people, that provide social support – through friends, neighbours, membership of organisations; and formal support through services and facilities.¹⁵ Second, relationships with place, that provide emotional attachments such as belonging, memories, cultural heritage, aesthetics, employment, education, transport, housing, leisure, shops, security and sustainability.¹⁶ Third, relationships with power – relating to political voice and participation, inclusion, inequalities of access to local resources and opportunities, a sense of collective control and influence.¹⁷ Fourth, a balance between hedonic (enjoyment-related) and eudaimonic (purpose-related) wellbeing, both of which are required for an acceptable and adaptive level of wellbeing.¹⁸ Fifth, the capacity for intergenerational transmission of meanings, values

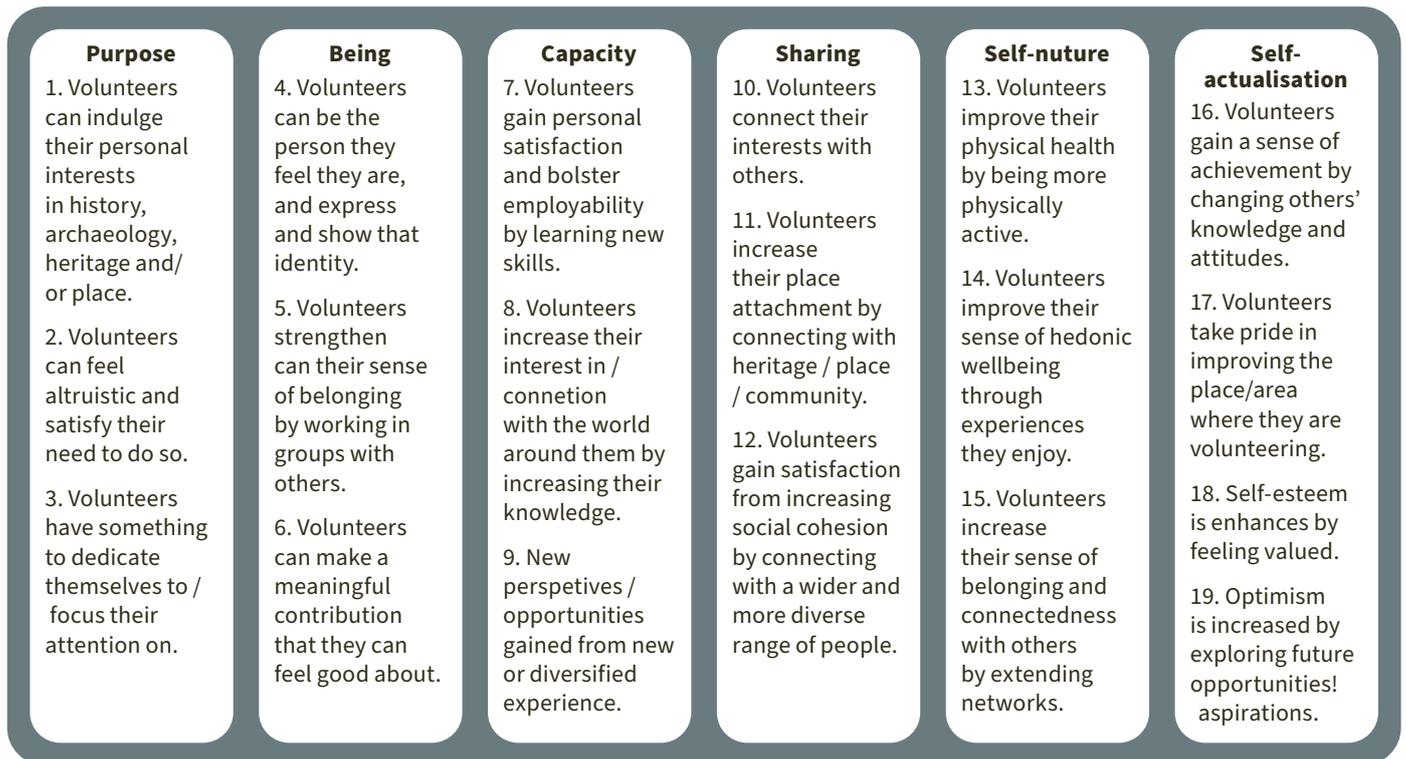


Fig. 1: Visual summary of the 19 categories of comments identified in the 2020–21 HARAW (Heritage at Risk and Wellbeing) analysis, which showed participation in heritage conservation activities to be associated with wellbeing (grouped by the researchers into six overarching themes). Categories highlighted in white are those closely related to conditions underpinning community wellbeing.

and relations, which are part of how communities form their identity.¹⁹

The following sections review two recent research projects that have shown some of the ways in which heritage can support community wellbeing.

1. Heritage at Risk and Wellbeing

In 2020–21 the *Heritage at Risk and Wellbeing* (HARAW) project²⁰ was funded by *Historic England* (the government agency responsible for heritage policy in England) to investigate the associations between volunteering on heritage sites and wellbeing. The research involved thematic analyses of an 80,000-word transcript of in-depth post-participation interviews with 35 adults who had volunteered on activities funded to support heritage sites previously deemed to be ‘at risk’. Importantly, the primary purpose of this funding was to improve the condition of the heritage assets, thus it responded to the ‘protection’ aims of the Valletta Treaty rather than the ‘connection’ aims of the Faro Convention.²¹

HARAW analysis clearly showed that participation in these activities also benefitted wellbeing, in a range of ways defined by 19 categories grouped into six themes (Fig. 1). Much of the wellbeing association related to personal wellbeing, but here we

can look at the categories for their relevance to community wellbeing. This shows that nine of the 19 categories (highlighted in white in Fig. 1) related to aspects of community wellbeing, include numbers 5 (*Volunteers strengthen their sense of belonging by working in groups with others*); 8 (*Volunteers increase their interest in / connection with the world around them by increasing their knowledge*); 10 (*Volunteers connect their interests with others*); 11 (*Volunteers increase their place attachment by connecting with heritage / place / community*); 12 (*Volunteers gain satisfaction from increasing social cohesion by connecting with a wider and more diverse range of people*); 14 (*Volunteers improve their sense of hedonic wellbeing through experiences they enjoy*); 15 (*Volunteers increase their sense of belonging and connectedness with others by extending networks*); 16 (*Volunteers gain a sense of achievement by changing others’ knowledge and attitudes*) and 17 (*Volunteers take pride in improving the place/area where they are volunteering*). We see a clear link between these and the relationships with people, place and power that have been identified as vital factors in community wellbeing, as well as their capacity to support intergenerational transmission of meanings, values and relations.

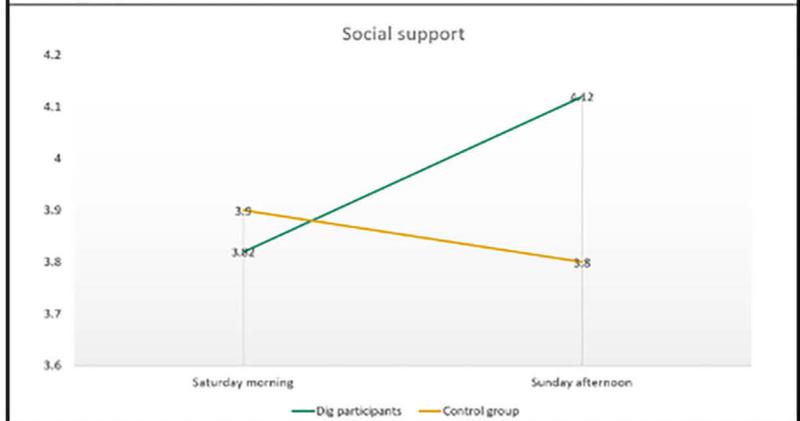
The HARAW research also explored whether – and if so, how – heritage volunteering benefits wellbeing in ways that other forms of volunteering may not.²² This showed the ‘special’ power of *heritage* activities for wellbeing lies in the force-multiplying interaction of eight cross-cutting characteristics (Temporality, Discovery, Authenticity, Continuity, Rescue, Nostalgia, Transformation and Legacy), many or all of which are typically offered together in heritage activities. In considering here their likely impact on community wellbeing, we see that Authenticity, Continuity, Rescuing, Nostalgia, Transformation and Legacy relate closely to conditions for community wellbeing. Under Authenticity, for example, the positive impact on empathy and attachment from feeling connected to irreplaceable tangible remains from the past can strengthen relationships between people and place.²³ Under Rescuing and Transformation, relationships with power (that includes political voice and a sense of collective control and influence) are offered by opportunities to experience success over adversity, reassurance that change over time is possible and satisfaction in helping achieve change.²⁴ Under Nostalgia, connecting with lost pasts increases connectedness, continuity, belonging and empathy (supporting social cohesion, social inclusion and intergenerational transmission).²⁵ In seeing close links between these affects and conditions underpinning community wellbeing, we can note that characteristics such as Nostalgia and Authenticity are among those most often manipulated when the power of heritage is instrumentalised for malign purposes.

2. Community Archaeology in Rural Environments Meeting Societal Challenges (2019–22)

Community Archaeology in Rural Environments Meeting Societal Challenges (CARE) was funded by the EU’s Horizon 2020 programme to investigate the benefits of community archaeology in four different European communities with very different political histories (Czech Republic, Netherlands, Poland and UK). Two strands of this research are particularly relevant to the discussion of how heritage participation affects community wellbeing.

The first was a quantitative study conducted in 2019 in the Netherlands and UK (unfortunately prevented from being extended to the Czech Republic and Poland by the COVID-19 pandemic). This used methods from psychology to conduct an experimental study of the impact on rural residents of participation in archaeological excavations within

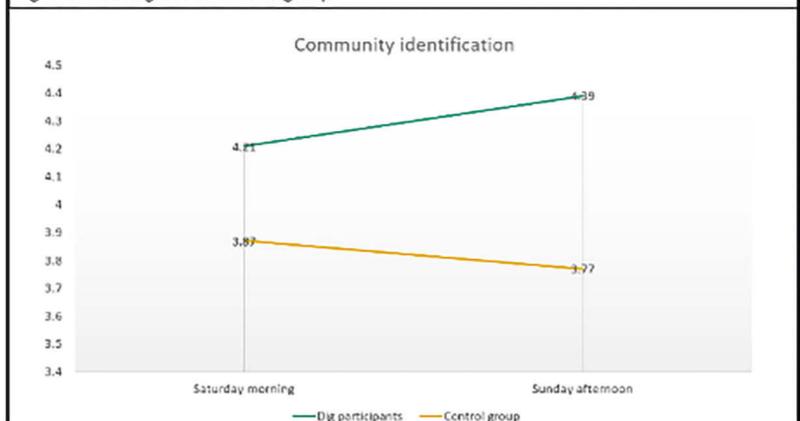
Excavation participants reported significantly higher **social support** (how supportive people feel their community is) at time 2 than at time 1, while there was no significant change in the control group for this condition.



Excavation participants reported a significant rise in **life satisfaction** (how pleased people feel about their lives) at time 2 compared to time 1, while there was no significant change over time in the control group.



Participants in the excavation group showed an increase in **community identification** (how closely people feel they belong in their community) between time 1 and 2, while there was no significant change in the control group.



their own villages.²⁶ Surveys were completed by excavation participants at two time points, and also by control groups (of local residents *not* participating in the excavations, matched for geographical area, demographic composition and socio-economic status), who completed the surveys at the same times. The surveys comprised 32 statements (validated by previ-

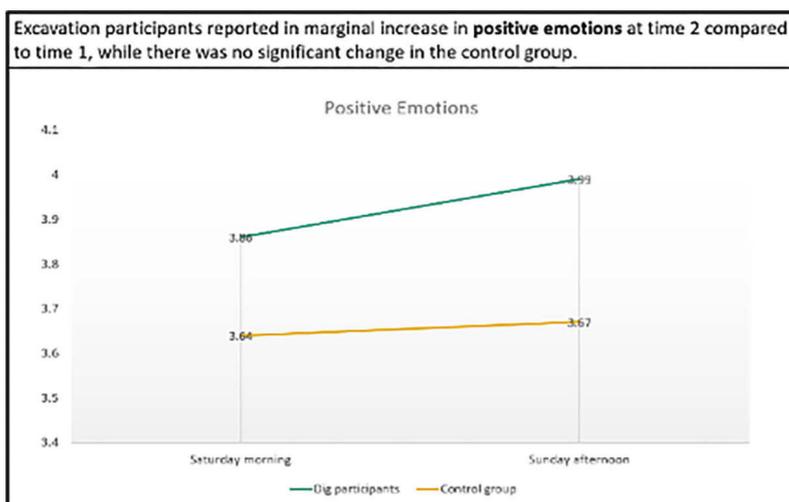
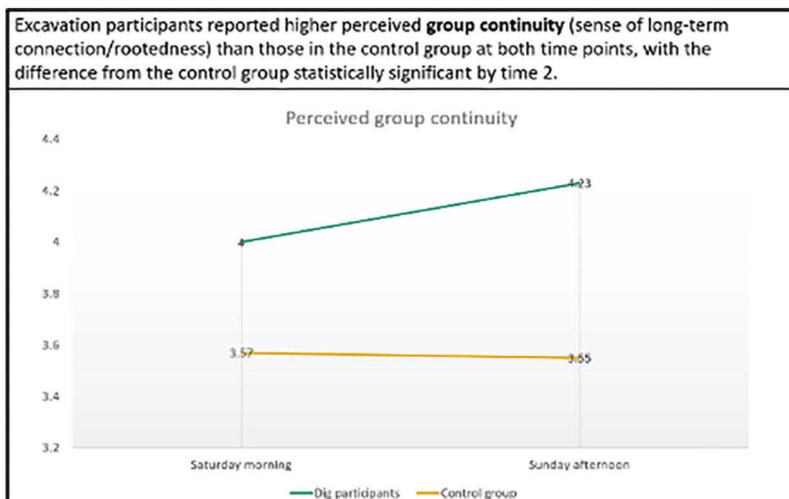
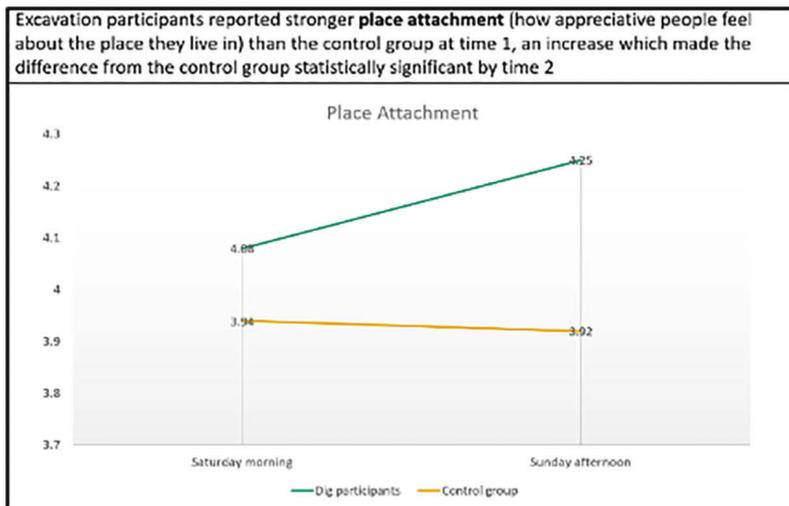


Fig. 2: Graphs showing responses to the 2019 CARE quantitative survey by psychologists before and after archaeological excavations carried out by local residents within their own villages in the Netherlands and UK for six conditions. Graphs show totalled responses for excavation participants (in green) and the non-participant control group (in yellow).

ous studies, mostly in the field of Social Identity Theory) asking for Likert-style responses grading agreement/disagreement on a 5-point scale immediately before and after the excavation activities (morning of day 1 and afternoon of day 2).

Comparing responses before and after participation showed positive changes among participants that were not observed in the control group (Fig. 2); therefore, the changes could be ascribed to the experience of participation in the heritage activity. The psychological conditions where this was evident included social support (how supportive people feel their community is), life satisfaction (how pleased people feel about their lives), community identification (how closely people feel they belong in their community), place attachment (how appreciative people feel about the place they live in), group continuity (sense of long-term connection/rootedness), community esteem and a range of emotions. We can see these conditions relate directly to key factors that underpin community wellbeing relating as they do to interpersonal relationships, social cohesion and social inclusion. These include “relationships with people, that provide social support” and “relationships with place that provide emotional attachments”. This link becomes even more apparent when we look at a sample of the statements used in the survey (Fig. 3).²⁷

The 2019 study was particularly important as it was the first to use a control group in the context of a heritage study, which enabled it to show a causal link between action and effect. Previously, although studies collecting “quantitative evidence using randomly selected groups and a control group, are often considered the ‘gold standard’ in the medical and scientific professions [...] The cultural sector, however, generally uses smaller sample sizes and qualitative evidence, meaning that credibility and impact can be harder to prove [...]”²⁸

Having demonstrated the causal link using quantitative methods, in 2022 the CARE team returned to one of the UK communities to conduct in-depth interviews with a new cohort of participants (carrying out the same activity as in 2019), in order to collect qualitative data on participants’ experience. Coding the 52,000-word interview transcript, using codes based on the 2019 survey statements, gave a more nuanced insight into how and why the local, place-based heritage activities undertaken by CARE volunteers impact positively on community wellbeing. Coded comments show vividly how the emotional lived experience of heritage participation

Theme	Statement (2019 psychology survey)
Community identification	I see myself as being part of my local community
	I am pleased to be part of my local community
	I feel strong ties with people in my local community
	I can identify with people in my local community.
Social Support	People within my local community really try to help each other out.
	I have friends in my local community who I can share my joys & sorrows with
	If I need help or support with anything, I know I can rely on members of my local community
	There are members of my local community who are a real comfort to me
Continuity past present future	Being a member of my local community gives me a sense of continuity between past, present, future
	Being a member of my local community gives me a feeling of being connected with the past.
	Being a member of my local community gives me the feeling that I am part of a long tradition & history
Community esteem	I feel that my local community is worthy
	My local community does not have much to be proud of
	On the whole I am satisfied with my local community
	I feel that my local community has a number of good qualities
	I take a positive attitude toward my local community
Place attachment	I feel that the place I live in (my village, town or neighbourhood) is a part of me.
	The place I live in is very special to me.
	I identify strongly with the place I live in.
	I am very attached to the place I live in.
	The place I live in means a lot to me

Fig. 3: The statements used in the summary of the 2019 CARE quantitative survey (abbreviated).

related to conditions underpinning community well-being, including relationships with people (which includes “social support through friends, neighbours”, etc), relationships with place (including emotional attachments such as belonging, memories and cultural heritage) and relationships with power (relating to participation, inclusion, opportunities and also collective control and influence), and offers a combination of hedonic and eudaimonic wellbeing alongside opportunities for intergenerational transmission of meanings, values and relations.²⁹

Discussion

In the studies discussed here, we see evidence, using qualitative and quantitative methodologies, that heritage participation supports community wellbeing in a range of specific, identifiable ways, whose causal connection has been measured quantitatively and whose emotional impact has been captured qualitatively. In both studies reviewed above, heritage processes operate as bottom-up, participatory activities, delivered in collaboration with local community groups in ways that strengthen communities by bringing people together, strengthening perceptions of trust and belonging, and increasing community esteem and place attachment. We see heritage participation contributing to both aspects of community wellbeing (“*living well together at a community scale*” and “*the role of community-scale aspects of living on individual wellbeing*”³⁰) and to nurturing community wellbeing by harnessing the strong emotional appeal of the past in ways that bring people together.

We might expect that evidence of this sort – showing how heritage is able to benefit society in ways that can contribute positively to major policy issues such as mental health and social cohesion – would be of great interest to politicians and policy-makers. However, while national heritage agencies in some countries have developed wellbeing strategies,³¹ such interest is not yet widely seen. In the 2024 European Parliament elections, for example, the *European Association of Archaeologists* compiled a list of benchmarks for archaeology and heritage protection, comprising the five most pressing topics that fall within the remit of the European Parliament.³² None of these related to the role of heritage as a social benefit – but in any case, only three of the seven political parties provided any response. Perhaps the heritage sector is not making the case sufficiently effectively – but neither does the political sphere demonstrate great interest in listening.

This lack of political interest and awareness is regrettable, because viewing heritage as a ‘public good’ that increases community wellbeing and social cohesion offers a potentially valuable counter to the divisive uses of heritage favoured by right-wing populists who, as Laurajane Smith has noted, use “revisionist, mythologized, or overly selective histories that avoid ambiguity and emphasize the positive, heroic, and patriotic or nationalistic pride [...] [to] [...] manage present-day emotions or affective states.”³³ Smith notes “There are lessons to be learnt by the left in analysing how particular emotions, specifically nostalgia, are used, which can facilitate the development of ways

to challenge right-wing populism”.³⁴ The studies discussed in this paper certainly show that heritage has high ‘emotional valence’ that can impact strongly on people’s feelings. However by showing the positive impacts of place-based heritage participation on communities as well as individuals, the studies discussed here offer one way in which heritage could contribute to such lessons – based not on what society can do for heritage, but on what heritage can do for society.³⁵

Conclusion

This review of recent research into heritage participation has considered its impact on community wellbeing and noted the disconnect between emerging evidence and wider political interest. With wider reference to the themes explored in the 2024 AKTLD conference, we can identify some priorities for the future. Firstly, we need to advance understanding of the impact of heritage participation on communities, civil society and citizenship. Secondly, we need to advance transnational understanding of the impact of different social and political histories on the capacity of community groups, charities and governmental authorities at all scales to offer heritage participation as a socially beneficial process. Thirdly, we need to widen awareness of the ways in which heritage participation benefits communities. Fourthly, we need to use this knowledge, understanding and awareness to ensure that, in the future, ever more communities benefit from the impacts of heritage participation.

Acknowledgements: The research discussed in this paper was funded by the European Union’s Horizon 2020 Joint Project Initiative through the Arts and Humanities Research Council (UK); Nederlandse Organisatie voor Wetenschappelijk Onderzoek (Netherlands); Ministerstvo školství, mládeže a tělovýchovy, Odbor výzkumu a vývoje and National Institute for Museums and Public Collections, Ministry of Culture and National Heritage (Poland); and by Historic England (UK). Lead researchers, colleagues and collaborators who have worked with me on these projects have included (on the CARE project) Pavel Vařeka (University of West Bohemia), Heleen van Londen and Johan Verspay (University of Amsterdam), Arkadiusz Marciniak, (Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań, Poland), Kornelia Kajda and Dawid Kobiałka (independent researchers, Poland), Anna Rabinovich and Ambra Brizi (then University of Exeter, now at Sussex and Leiden respectively) and Greg Frame (then the University of Lincoln, now Nottingham); and (on the HARAW project) Niro Siriwardena, Despina Lapidou, Julie Pattinson, Claudia Sima, Anna Scott, Heather Hughes, Joseph Akanuwe (all University of Lincoln). Thousands of other people (too numerous to name here individually) have taken part in the programmes that formed part of this research. Without the contributions of everyone involved (named or unnamed), the research could not have been carried out and this paper could not have been written.

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Heritage and Identity

Co-production and Wellbeing in Heritage Projects

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ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

Dieser Beitrag beschäftigt sich mit *Building on History*, ein Projekt, das von Historic England (HE) und Historic Environment Scotland (HES) entwickelt wurde. Das Projekt war Teil des Programms *Outreach to Ownership Pilot*, das vom *Arts and Humanities Research Council* (England und Schottland) finanziert wurde. *Building on History* war ein Partnerschaftsprojekt im Zeitraum 2021–2023, das gemeinschaftsgeleitete Forschung unterstützte und darauf abzielte, den Wert der Künste und Geisteswissenschaften für minorisierte Gruppen zu erforschen und integrativere Formen der Beschäftigung mit Kultur und Kulturerbe zu fördern. Die Hauptakteure waren *Heritage Lincolnshire* (HL), das die Finanzierung sicherstellte und das Projekt verwaltete und leitete, sowie Gemeindeleiter und ihre Gruppen, mit denen das Format und der Inhalt von Workshops gemeinsam entwickelt wurden, sowie Wissenschaftler*innen und Student*innen der *Nottingham Trent University* (NTU), die die gemeinsame Entwicklung und Durchführung von Gemeinde-Workshops und Projektergebnissen wie Fragebögen und Websites unterstützten.

Durch die Durchführung von geförderten Projekten haben HL und NTU demokratischere Ansätze für die Beteiligung der Gemeinschaft am kulturellen Erbe spezifiziert, die die Förderung von *Community Pride*, *Wellbeing* und kultureller Identität unterstützen. In diesem Beitrag stellen Mitglieder von HL und NTU ihre Ansätze zur Koproduktion und zum Engagement im Projekt *Building on History* vor. Diese reichen von der Entwicklung von Strategien zur Vermittlung (Outreach) bis hin zur gemeinsamen Entwicklung zugänglicher digitaler Tools, die die Anerkennung des vielfältigen kulturellen Erbes ermöglichen (Ownership). Diese Methoden sind anpassungsfähig, flexibel und inklusiv und ermöglichen es den Gemeinschaften, ihre Orte und damit ihr Erbe zu gestalten und in Wert zu setzen.

ABSTRACT

This paper reports on *Building on History*, a project developed through Historic England (HE) and Historic Environment Scotland (HES), the main public bodies looking after the historic environment of England and Scotland. The project formed part of the umbrella programme *Outreach to Ownership Pilot*, funded by the *Arts and Humanities Research Council* (England and Scotland). *Building on History* (delivered in two phases during 2021–2023) was a partnership project that supported community-led research, aiming to explore the value of the arts and humanities for minoritised communities, and promoted more inclusive forms of engagement with culture and heritage. The main stakeholders were *Heritage Lincolnshire* (HL), who secured the funding, and managed and led the project; community leaders and their groups, with whom the format was co-designed and the content of the workshops co-created; and academics and students from *Nottingham Trent University* (NTU), who facilitated the co-design and delivery of community workshops and project outputs such as questionnaires and websites.

Through the delivery of funded projects, HL and NTU have honed more democratic approaches to community participation in heritage, encouraging the promotion of cultural pride and identity and resulting in better wellbeing outcomes. In this paper, members of HL and NTU share their approaches to co-production and engagement on the *Building on History* project, within the *Outreach to Ownership Pilot Programme* – ranging from the development of heritage engagement strategies (outreach) to the co-creation of accessible digital tools that enabled the recognition of diverse heritage(s) (ownership). These methodologies are adaptable, flexible, and inclusive and enable communities to shape their places and recognise, as they did during the workshops, what they value – in other words, their heritage.

Introduction

This paper presents the *Building on History* project, which explored the potential for co-creating a digital tool to aid in simplifying and demystifying the heritage designation process and other routes to recognising the heritage of diverse communities. This idea was tested through the delivery of workshops involving several community groups from diverse backgrounds and with varied needs, based in Nottingham and Lincolnshire, UK. The workshops were facilitated by community members, and involved collecting qualitative and quantitative data to determine the efficacy of a digital approach, and whether the project's prototype digital tool met the needs of multiple different communities.

The project embraced a democratic process by encouraging a bottom-up strategy designed by community leaders, who pushed boundaries to include alternative narratives of intangible heritage representing communities from Nottingham and Lincolnshire. The process began by unpacking institutional structures, narratives, and language around what is and is not “heritage”, using a range of engagement strategies to reach and empower audiences that have not traditionally engaged with heritage projects. Through their participation, what is considered heritage by established institutions was democratised, and people's wellbeing was boosted through greater inclusion and visibility. This paper presents a summary of the two phases. This first phase included several groups across Lincolnshire and Nottingham, and was designed to test a digital tool to encourage heritage designation. The communities identified to participate in this phase were considered ‘minoritised’ for different reasons: age, ethnic and cultural background, learning difficulties, and other characteristics. The goal was to explore whether the heritage of these ‘minoritised’ communities could be part of heritage designation, by using the toolkit (website). This led to highlighting the relevance of heritage assets connected to these communities. Phase 2 followed this up, highlighting the role of heritage (and its recognition) in improving mental health through sense of pride and belonging. Only two groups took part in the second phase: Angolan Women's Voice (a charity based in Nottingham), and communities connected to the Windrush generations in Nottingham.

The main aim of the project was to develop a novel approach to workshop delivery, transferring power and ownership from *HL/NTU* to the com-



Fig. 1: Film screening at *Skate Nottingham* workshop during Phase 1 of the project (2022).

munities participating. Instead of managing and organising the workshops in our premises (*HL/NTU*), we invited the community leaders to decide how to use the budget allocated, acknowledging their knowledge of the different groups involved. Each group – Angolan Women (with *Angolan Women's Voice* charity); Nottingham's skateboarding community (with *Skate Nottingham*) and graffiti artists (with *Montana Shop*); Ukrainian refugee children in Nottingham; Hollygirt Primary School; *Linkage* (a charity that works with people with learning disabilities in Lincolnshire); military veterans; and a church group in Lincolnshire – was given a budget to run community workshops where they would test the website. Each group used their budget to cover venue hire, food, workshop materials, gifts for participation, and payment for facilitation accordingly. Each workshop was evaluated by *HL/NTU* by observation, and using (with written consent) data received from the participants.

The celebration of these workshops explored people's heritage from very different perspectives, and non-traditional ideas of heritage were represented by participants' responses throughout the research. This aligned with the identities of the invited communities, which can be considered ‘minoritised’ for different reasons, and which represent the diversity of our society. Consequently, a significant amount of helpful feedback was received on the digital tool, which will feed into a revised co-created version ready for future use with other communities.

Methodology

At the core of the methodology resides the philosophy of Participatory Action Research (PAR): “committed to democratic principles of justice and equality. It is an inclusive practice of research defined both by participation and a determination to produce knowledge in the interest of social change.”¹ Like other Action Research approaches, PAR is a way of “doing research *with people*, not *on them*”,² which reinforces a democratic framework for our research. Following Phase 1 of the study (detailed below), a key element of community engagement for the project was that the workshops were all facilitator-led by a member of the relevant community. These facilitators were identified by community connectors and by the community groups themselves. Their involvement was essential to creating an open environment where people felt welcome to fully participate; as well as for avoiding consultation fatigue and embracing the emergent nature of PAR: all stakeholders guide the project.³ As a legacy of the project, it was planned for the communities to have ongoing ownership of their contributions. This also placed control of delivering the workshops entirely in the hands of the community and enabled them to make all decisions, such as appropriate venues and refreshments, and paying community facilitators for their time to recognise their contribution. Facilitators

were offered support with promoting the workshops, and invoices from venues and caterers were paid directly through *HL*.

Alongside PAR, our research approach embraces the philosophy of Students as Partners: “a collaborative, reciprocal process through which all participants have the opportunity to contribute equally, although not necessarily in the same ways, to curricular or pedagogical conceptualisation, decision making, implementation, investigation, or analysis.”⁴ Several summer internships were funded through the project so that *NTU* students could support the development of workshop activities alongside the community groups. Students and facilitators were given training virtually through *HL* and Catherine Bloodworth at *Bright Culture* (evaluation consultants for *Outreach to Ownership*). The training focused on providing tools to successfully deliver their workshops, and guidance on the evaluation of heritage activities and how to measure its impact on participants’ wellbeing. Ana Souto, Penelope Siebert (academics from *NTU*), and *NTU* students were also present at workshops – supporting delivery as well as observing responses and conducting data collection. The training included an example workshop structure and listed the types of expenditure that the budget could be used for.

Each facilitator was given a budget of £800 to



Fig. 2: Activities at Skate Nottingham workshop during Phase 1 of the project (2022).

cover their time contribution to the project, venue hire, catering, and participant rewards for each workshop. This meant that not only was the community providing data for this research project, but that under-represented communities were being paid for their time, appropriately recognising the value of their time, views, and expertise. The workshops in Phase 1 were designed flexibly with each facilitator to suit the needs of the project (i.e., answering the research questions through data capture) while accommodating the specific needs and requirements of each community. The basic structure required time to allow the workshop participants to reflect on the meaning and significance of heritage, and also time to try out the website with the prototype digital tool, provide feedback on any issues, and suggest changes. Co-design was an essential part of creating the digital tool, arranging the workshops, and of all other stages in the project's progress.

As part of the workshops, facilitators were accompanied by observers from *HL* or Nottingham community connectors. Their roles were to take notes on the results of the workshops and support the facilitators and community groups in the workshop activities. These observers worked with the facilitators to provide feedback and data to *HL* for the research project. Standardised feedback and consent forms were provided for each workshop. However, aligning with the values of co-production, and given the different workshop activities, the format of this feedback was unique to each workshop.

In Phase 2 we worked with two communities that demonstrated a clear interest in participating in a discussion on: (group 1) their diasporic identity, and (group 2) how to address the Windrush scandal⁵ (and trauma) with celebration and dissemination of their heritage. Similar ideas of heritage came to the fore: music, dance, food, community engagement, memories, etc. The oral testimonies dwell on these issues, which the participants were happy to share with a broader audience.

Phase 1: Outreach

Using existing collaborations between *HL* and *NTU*, the first phase of what became a two-phase project focused on co-creating a digital tool that recognises the diverse heritage and communities present in Nottingham and Lincolnshire. The project was granted up to £30,000 from HE/HES to develop a prototype digital tool (a website) to be tested during the workshops.⁶

As part of the research project, workshops were organised in the UK city of Nottingham and the neighbouring county of Lincolnshire. Although the initial goal was to host an equal number of events in each location, ultimately, five workshops took place in Lincolnshire and seven in Nottingham. A total of eight different communities took part in the project. The participants were of diverse backgrounds, including People with Black, Asian, or other minority ethnic heritage; young people under 25 (school-aged children and young people aged 16–25 outside of school); people with disabilities; and people who are disadvantaged by their social and/or economic background, circumstances, or by where they live (refugees, some of whom had escaped active war zones a week prior). Data were not collected to determine whether this project engaged with the LGBTQ+ community. A workshop was designed for delivery specifically by the LGBTQ+ community in Nottingham; however, this was not possible within the timeframe.

Working with communities from the inception of the project helped make the toolkit as accessible as possible. For example, for the *Angolan Woman's Centre* the toolkit was translated into Portuguese to enable understanding by all workshop participants (Fig. 3). Linkage supported the creation of a Makaton version of the toolkit and consent form, enabling engagement by all workshop participants.

Linkage Community Trust Workshop, Lincolnshire

Several accessibility issues were identified by the facilitator before the event took place, and *Linkage* produced a set of worksheets that included more accessible images and formatting so that more of the group could participate fully in the activities. This is a vital consideration when reviewing the toolkit – it cannot rely upon images that are easily misinterpreted.

The group identified a range of types of heritage and used 'widget cards' as a basis for discussion. The group identified prawns (in the context of Grimsby's fishing heritage), castles, and Lincoln cathedral as heritage. On a more personal level, participants identified themes around their own heritage. The group talked a lot about family history, the history of woodlands, heritage of football, the history of castles, a little about archaeology and what can be found below the ground, as well as the history of food and what can be grown in Lincolnshire.

BEM-ESTAR E HERANÇA

Estamos olhando para a conexão entre patrimônio e bem-estar. Estamos usando os 5 caminhos para o bem-estar para explorar a conexão. Por favor, marque ✓ a resposta com a qual você concorda.

De qual maneira falar e compartilhar a sua herança com outras pessoas afetaria seu bem-estar?

	Não, eu não faria	Não tenho certeza	Sim eu iria	Eu já faço
Você se conectaria mais com as pessoas ao seu redor?				
Você prestaria mais atenção nas coisas e refletiria sobre o que é importante para você?				
Você seria mais ativo?				
Você aprenderia mais ou redescobriria um antigo interesse?				
Você se voluntariaria e contribuiria mais para a comunidade?				

WELLBEING AND HERITAGE

We are looking at the connection between heritage and wellbeing. We are using the 5 ways to wellbeing to explore the connection. Please tick ✓ the answer you agree with.

In what way would talking and sharing your heritage with others impact on your wellbeing?

	No, I would not	I am not sure	Yes, I would	I already do
Would you connect more with people around you?				
Would you take more notice on things and reflect on what is important to you?				
Would you be more active?				
Would you learn more or rediscover an old interest?				
Would you volunteer your time and contribute to the community more?				

Fig. 3: Postcard activities from Phase 2 of the project in both English (1a) and Portuguese (1b).

There was enthusiasm around recognising things of value locally, and the group was interested in finding out more – especially about archaeology. It was recorded that participants' understanding of heritage did change during the workshop. However, the toolkit was of extremely limited potential for this group, due to several concerns that would need to be addressed for it to be effective for future exploration.

Graffiti Workshop, Montana Shop, Nottingham

This workshop was attended by approximately 15 families, some of whom also attended the *Skate Nottingham* workshop (see below).

Given the significant overlap between the graffiti and skateboarding communities, the workshops were scheduled for the same day and were also located in the same Nottingham suburb (Sneinton) as a Street Art Festival, which drew in additional participants and enriched the activities of both workshops.

The graffiti workshop was facilitated by the Montana Shop in Sneinton Market. The shop hosted a small exhibition of 1980s spray cans and pictures, which prompted a talk about the importance of these objects of graffiti heritage. A masterclass was also delivered, teaching participants how to write graffiti on paper and contribute to a mural co-designed by the children attending the event.

Data were collected from 12 participants who completed consent forms, mostly by mothers of children participating in the activities. Three responses came from graffiti artists. Answers were similar across the group, emphasising the importance of heritage for the graffiti community in Nottingham. Key themes mentioned for graffiti heritage included art styles, 1970s and 1980s New York, skateboarding, music, and locations of heritage significance such as Montana Shop and Sneinton Market. Responses indicated that participants would either use the digital tool to recognise their heritage, or they would like to think about it further. Most responded that their idea of heritage had changed during the workshop.

Skate Nottingham Workshop, Nottingham

Many discussions in the workshop concerned Nottingham's rich skating heritage and the lack of recognition of this important part of the city's culture. The workshop also included a skate session, and a film screening of an iconic skate edit from a local skater and videographer (Figs. 1 and 2), which fuelled discussions about heritage and how it should be valued, with special attention to how it can be recorded.

Luke Groom (*NTU*, student) was pivotal in the design of the questionnaires for the skating community, since he was a member of this group and had worked previously with the workshop facilitator, Chris Lawton (*Skate Nottingham*). His insight aligns with the main understanding of heritage from this group: "One of the most essential ideas behind skateboarding is its ever-present transitory nature. To skate is to explore the city, find new spots, enjoy them as a community, and then move on. [Thinking] of skating heritage as a transitory notion. Spaces and places that pass into history should be valued as heritage and therefore protected; [...] since it will become the heritage for new generations."

Participants were enthusiastic about the digital tool and were pleased that such a tool existed to recognise different types of heritage outside the traditional. One key piece of feedback was that, in using the tool, many found it difficult to assign their heritage to the categories provided, and that skating did not fit comfortably in that iteration of the tool. The feedback showed that 20% had no intention of using the tool, but 66% stated that they would definitely use it in the future to record their heritage.

Hollygirt Primary School Y4 Workshop, Nottingham

The primary school pupils who participated in this workshop stated that they were very comfortable using the digital tool and that it was useful for information, but noted that they might need an adult's help. An important piece of feedback came from a student who had learning difficulties, who struggled to follow along with the website and did not understand it. Pupils generally agreed that they would use the tool to recognise something they value. Two barriers were identified in the use of the tool: difficulty finding it, and needing permission from an adult to use it. Pupils responded unanimously that they understood more about heritage after the workshop.

Angolan Community Group, Nottingham

Two sessions were delivered by *Angolan Women's Voice* in Nottingham on 21 and 23 July 2022. The first was incorporated into a recurring community event, which was attended by people from the Angolan community, Nottingham residents, and other community members. There were 20 participants at this event.

Participants were invited to wear traditional Angolan dresses; a presentation was given on Angolan heritage, and the digital tool was introduced to the group. Participants were asked to raise their hands if they would be interested in using the tool to recognise their heritage, and most responded in the affirmative. Participants were also invited to complete a questionnaire, and a lunch of Angolan food and music with Angolan dance took place afterwards.

Twelve participants consented to the inclusion of their questionnaire responses in the research. Participants understood heritage in different ways, including: “Heritage can be objects/ways of life that are passed down between generations. These things could be clothes, hairstyles, and mannerisms” and “An African nation that symbolises the happiness and wellbeing of its children, through brotherhood.” Participants were invited to draw their heritage. These drawings included food, dancing; and the Angolan flag, animals, and other artefacts. With regards to Angolan heritage in Nottingham, participants emphasised the importance of Mojatu (the site of their community meetings) as a heritage location central to the community.

The first workshop was followed the next weekend by an event for Angolan children, attended by 18 children and their families. Five participants

completed the consent forms. Most participants were Portuguese, British, and/or Angolan, and they usually attended these events to learn Portuguese, learn about Angola, or simply be in touch with other members of the community. Children were invited to wear traditional Angolan clothes, and a presentation on Angolan heritage was delivered before they were asked to complete the questionnaires. Their definitions showed a good understanding of what heritage is: “something you care for: language, food”; and the majority felt they had a connection with Angolan heritage. Like the adults, the children also highlighted food, language, and hairstyles as Angolan heritage.

Most participants identified food as an essential element of Angolan heritage, which was supported by the lunch offered during the event. Other key elements of Angolan heritage were music, hairstyles, and family. Language was identified as a key element prior to the event, which was therefore made accessible to all participants in both English and Portuguese (as was the website).

Phase 2: Ownership

Of the groups that participated in Phase 1, two – Windrush generations and *Angolan Women’s Voice* charity – were invited to take part in Phase 2 as a

1 WHAT IS CARIBBEAN HERITAGE?

PARTICIPANT NUMBER

Please write a few sentences and/or do a drawing that represents Caribbean Heritage.

4 HOW WOULD YOU LIKE TO RECORD YOUR HERITAGE ON THE WEBSITE?

Please answer in a few sentences or with a drawing. You can **circle** the examples listed below, but you are also welcome to write or draw your own ideas for the website.

Community	Music	Dance	Photos	Places- Map of Nottingham	Clothes	Recipes	Portraits of members of community

Fig. 3: Postcard activities from Phase 2 of the project in both English (1a) and Portuguese (1b).

means to further develop their agency and embrace the ownership of their diasporic intangible heritage. Academics and students from *NTU* supported the co-production of knowledge by collecting and recording their intangible heritage through a new website.⁷

These workshops allowed participants to design the delivery of a second workshop, to co-create the material to be included in the website, recognising the importance of recording their heritage, not only for their community in the diaspora, but also for others to learn about their identity and customs (Fig. 4). This project embraced an inclusive approach in order to enhance the sense of belonging and wellbeing; a recording of diasporic identities, to promote a pluralistic heritage that represents our multicultural society. We recognise the need to support more inclusive definitions that reflect “everyday heritage”.⁸ This is embedded in diasporic cultural practices, such as food, dance, traditional dress, and language.⁹

Angolan Women’s Voice, Nottingham

Paula Pontes assisted in facilitating workshops through her connection with the *Angolan Women’s Voice* charity, following on from Phase 1. Sentiments of trust and enthusiasm to collaborate were visible and palpable among the group. The community welcomed the project and were happy to participate. They understood the intentions and aims of the team and the project as a whole: connecting heritage, and its impact on wellbeing (sense of belonging). During the first workshop, aimed at planning what could be recorded through an online tool as Angolan heritage, the participants were asked to what extent the session impacted their wellbeing. Their responses were analysed using the *Five Ways to Wellbeing*¹⁰ toolkit (minus the “*staying active*” component). Of the 19 participants in the first workshop, 18 rated their participation in the project as having an impact of 3–4 (out of 5) for promoting connections, taking notice, learning, and giving to their community.

The final output of this co-created project was a website that captured the main elements that these communities identified at the core of their diasporic intangible heritage. For the Angolan community, this included fashion, food and cuisine, arts and crafts, music and dance, and the dissemination of individual stories that represented oral testimonies from the community.

Windrush Generations, Nottingham

A set of three previous workshops involving the Windrush community demonstrated a clear interest in discussing their diasporic identity, and how to address the Windrush scandal (and trauma) with celebration and dissemination of their heritage. These workshops were organised by the community leader Clive Foster, to explore and celebrate the history and culture of the Windrush era. Through this, we wanted to raise awareness of its importance to British society and to ensure that the stories of this time are never forgotten.

Participants claimed that “our heritage includes everything that we have inherited from the past. These can be physical (tangible) objects such as buildings or artefacts, to intangible objects such as traditions, customs, and dance.” As per the Angolan women’s group, similar ideas of heritage came to the fore: music, dance, food, community engagement, memories, etc. The oral testimonies dwell on these issues, and participants were happy to share these with a broader audience. The story of Louise, a member of the community, reflected on her personal journey, as well as the broader issues that encompass being part of a diasporic community. The website also records events held to commemorate the 75th anniversary of the Windrush migration to the UK.¹¹

Conclusion

Providing the opportunity to work with minoritised communities is always meaningful: participants were grateful and excited to disseminate their heritage; academics and students, together with the community leaders, believe that this is a very important project and, as a result, have found a way to continue with the work beyond the timeframe and budget of the funded project. One legacy of this project is the completion of the website, which summarises the research gathered so far from these communities. Further contributions were produced by a group of students from *Karnavati University*, Gandhinagar, India, who completed a semester at *Nottingham Trent University*. One of the groups designed *MascararE*, a DIY mask-making kit inspired by Angolan masks that were traditionally made for rituals and to signify social status. The term combines the words “*mascarar*” (“mask” in Portuguese) and “*rare*”, as the kit aims to give the Angolan community a unique identity of its own. The kit provides a unique interactive, hands-on experience and knowledge about the cultures and traditions of Angola. It is cus-

tomisable to the level that users can create their own accessories and hairstyles.¹²

The students' feedback highlights the importance of working on authentic projects with members of the community: "This experience has reinforced the importance of user-centred design and the value of involving diverse voices in the decision-making process." For the academics at *NTU*, this project highlights the importance of working on live research projects¹³ – especially those with and for communities – using the PAR methodology. The approach was recognised as an example of good practice by the 2024 *Open Research Awards* at *Nottingham Trent University*.¹⁴

Offering a budget to communities made the work much more meaningful and enabled communities to be in control of the delivery of their workshops through their nominated facilitator. This process helped to navigate potential community sensitivities that the project delivery team might not have understood. The result was a more comfortable environment for community participation during the workshops and a sense of ownership of the results and outputs.

Participatory research such as in this project is a time-consuming process, but creates a democratic environment, incredibly meaningful results, and more in-depth engagement. Participants feel they can contribute to the project on an equal basis rather than the traditional hierarchy that places researchers above research subjects. However, it may also be accompanied by certain ethical issues. For

example, participants were invited to participate in the workshops, but not all of them wished to sign the consent forms, thereby making a significant part of the data inadmissible. Consent was given verbally in all workshops, but not formally in every instance. What can be reported is that all participants were excited to be involved in the projects, for the acknowledgement of their community heritage to be further shared and celebrated. This will eventually lead to more communities using the toolkit designed in Phase 1, to recognise and share their heritage.

Overall, participants agreed that there is a very close connection between heritage and wellbeing, and that a concise template for a two-phase workshop structure (firstly for planning; secondly for enacting, recording, and disseminating heritage) could be shared with the *UK National Health Service (NHS)* as a model of social prescribing.

Our main objectives recognised the significance of working with minoritised communities to explore a common understanding of the value of the arts and humanities, which led, in turn, to more inclusive forms of engagement with culture and heritage. We believe that sharing the ownership of the design and delivery of the workshops supported the promotion of cultural pride and identity (bottom-up approach), thereby resulting in better wellbeing outcomes. Finally, we would like to encourage other researchers and community leaders to embrace similar approaches to outreach and co-production of initiatives that celebrate heritage diversity.

Figures

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- 2 *Skate Nottingham.*
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**HERITAGE
AND
CIVIL
SOCIETY**

Heritage Conservation in Democracies

Riegl, Managing Change, and the Need to Organise Participation

HEIKE OEVERMANN

ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

Der Artikel diskutiert Prozesse, Verfahren und Fälle im Hinblick auf ihr Potenzial Kulturerbe als demokratischen Prozess und Kulturerbe in solchen zu verstehen. Obwohl diese zweifachen Prozesse noch nicht etabliert sind, stehen wir schon vor der nächsten Herausforderung: Wie reagieren wir – als Fachleute und als Zivilgesellschaften – wenn nicht-demokratische Akteure das Erbe für ihre Interessen (miss)brauchen?

Die Argumentation geht von Überlegungen des Denkmalpflegers Alois Riegl aus und plädiert für eine Organisation der Akteure und Prozesse der Abwägung als ein Management of Change. Darüber hinaus stützt sich der Artikel auf die Argumentation von Karl Popper und Ralf Dahrendorf, die Demokratie vor dem Hintergrund der Erfahrung der deutschen nationalsozialistischen Vergangenheit definieren. Kulturerbe in demokratischen Prozessen ermöglicht und fordert individuelle Verantwortung in den Denkmalinstitutionen und in der Zivilgesellschaft, sowie legitimierte Verfahren, die verschiedene Institutionen, Gruppen und Akteure miteinander verbinden. Dissonante Erbeobjekte und Formen des Protests zeigen den Bedarf an gemeinsamen Formen und Prozesse der Kritik, die offen sind für die unterschiedlichen Akteur:innen und auch die Argumente derjenigen berücksichtigen, die sich ins Unrecht versetzt fühlen. Daraus ergeben sich zwei grundlegende Argumente: Es braucht die gesellschaftliche Akzeptanz, dass Kritik sowohl einen rechtlichen Rahmen als auch vor- und nachbereitende Expertise benötigt; und das institutionelle Verständnis, dass Expertise ohne (institutionalisierte Formen der) Partizipation die Akzeptanz von Entscheidungen und letztlich die Demokratie insgesamt gefährdet.

ABSTRACT

Community involvement and participation activities are gaining increasing attention in heritage conservation; this article provides insights into processes, procedures, and cases that show the potential for understanding heritage as democratic process, and of heritage *within* democratic processes. However, although these processes are still to be established and elaborated, we face the next challenge: How do we – as professionals and as democratic civil societies – respond if non-democratic actors (mis)use heritage for their own interests? The argumentation is developed from considerations by the conservationist Riegl, and argues for an organisation of actors involving management of change. Furthermore, the article is informed by Karl Popper and Ralf Dahrendorf's argumentation, which defines democracy against the background of experiencing the Nazi past. Hence, heritage in democratic processes allows for – but also demands – individual responsiveness and responsibility in heritage institutions and in civil society, as well as legitimised procedures that link different institutions, groups, and actors. Conflicting phenomena, such as statues of anti-Semites and forms of protest, show crucially that criticism is needed, together with sufficient access to initiate and participate in associated debates while listening to all voices equally and considering the arguments of those who feel wronged by various historical and current sentiments represented in monuments. In consequence, two arguments follow: Society's acceptance that criticism needs both a legal framework and preparatory and follow-up expertise; and institutional understanding that expertise without (institutionalised forms of) participation jeopardises the acceptance of decisions and, ultimately, democracy as a whole.

The New Right

In November 2023, it was revealed that a far-right meeting in Potsdam discussed plans for so-called ‘remigration’. This would expel millions of people living in Germany, including both naturalised German citizens and asylum seekers. *Correctiv*, an investigative journalism network, reported that the same plan was launched concurrently by Martin Sellner, the Austrian leader of the far-right NGO *Identitäre*. *Identitäre* is part of the ‘Identitarian’ movement, and has both ideological and personal links to the far-right in Austria’s *Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs* (FPÖ) and Germany’s *Alternative für Deutschland* (AfD).¹ In response, large demonstrations in favour of human rights, freedom, and choice of diverse forms of living provided a symbolic rejection of the leaked plan; nevertheless, in federal state elections during September 2024, the AfD gained the largest share of votes in Thuringia² and the second-largest in Saxony,³ and has performed similarly in Brandenburg;⁴ the FPÖ, in turn, won the largest share of votes in Austria’s national election in autumn 2024.⁵ Consequently, far-right actors are/will be in a position to govern the cultural sector.

Other events: In summer 2024, it was reported that an AfD member of the Bavarian State Parliament (Franz Schmidt) had bid to purchase the listed Mattsies Castle in the Allgäu, which is in need of major conservation, to establish a “patriotic centre” there. In consequence, non-democratic actors are – as owners of built heritage – relevant partners in the management of heritage conservation. The professional heritage community (administration, authorities, and architects) and civil society (owners, users, or initiatives) must therefore deal with such actors in that context.

What do these worrying trends and tendencies in the political sphere have to do with heritage conservation? Heritage conservation is a political affair in giving meaning and interpretation to historic objects, environments, and places. The professional heritage communities in Germany and Austria value, select, and protect such assets in the public interest, in accordance with heritage conservation laws. Community involvement and participation activities are gaining increasing attention in heritage conservation, and this article provides insights into processes, procedures, and cases that show the potential for understanding heritage as democratic process, and heritage *within* democratic processes. However, although these processes are still to be established and

elaborated, we face the next challenge: What do we – as professionals and as democratic civil societies – do if non-democratic actors (mis)use heritage for their own – antidemocratic – interests?

Both Austria, Germany, and many other societies are democracies in the sense of the philosopher Karl Popper’s *Open Society*.⁶ The sociologist Ralf Dahrendorf positioned himself in following Popper;⁷ using these authors’ arguments to inspire and specify questions in our field of heritage conservation. Popper (1945) and Dahrendorf (1965) both developed their arguments from the case of Nazi Germany, of which Austria was a part, in mind. The Nazis misused heritage, and we see striking parallels among the “New Right” today.

In this context, the article considers the diverse perspectives of actors involved in the management of change processes, as well as rationalised processes of re-assessing heritage. The article does not consider memorial sites such as concentration camps, which require specific examination, but includes two examples of monuments located in Vienna that commemorate known anti-Semites, and Nazi architecture in Bozen/Bolzano. Instruments of heritage conservation in conservation practices, as well as the relationship between top-down and bottom-up approaches, are examined in more detail.

My core argument is that the professional heritage community strengthens democracy by establishing comprehensive communication and negotiation within a reliable framework of decision making on the one hand. On the other hand, institutionalised processes of criticism in heritage conservation must encompass personal and professional responsibility and rationalisation as well as responsiveness, and also give a voice to those who make arguments for democratic values. However, there is no clear answer yet, on how to limit the (potential) misuse of heritage by actors that Popper describes as enemies of the *Open Society*.

Heritage as Democratic Process

Alois Riegl and the Management of Change

The Austrian conservator Alois Riegl worked within a monarchy a good 120 years ago and, I argue, democratised the appreciation of historic objects, environments, and places. According to Riegl, the value of age, unlike historical value, is not specifically linked to expert knowledge, such as art history, but instead is directly perceptible by all using their own senses.⁸ The much-cited debate about how to

deal with the ancient Roman Diocletian's Palace in Spalato/Split around 1900 exemplifies how Riegl described the houses and uses that had grown and were established within the time.⁹ He pointed out traces of remodelling and decay that – while not of classical antiquity – had since generated age and atmospheric values. The conservator attached great importance to this sensual–emotional appreciation of the place and the process of *Werden und Vergehen* instead of advocating for the established position in conservation at that time, that solely prioritised the exposure of antiquities. This broad perception and assessment – of layers of time, heterogeneity, ambivalences, and polyvalence of this heritage – transcends the expertise of art and architectural history, and develops a social–political perspective that relates to all,¹⁰ and thus lays the figure of thought for foundational democratic processes and procedures in the field of heritage.

Since Riegl, discussion on the scope of values and processes of justification used in assessing and managing built heritage has developed further and has intensified in the past 20 years, e.g., through the *Assessing the Values of Cultural Heritage* report by the Getty Center.¹¹ The continuing discussion about *Authorised Heritage Discourse* (AHD) has fuelled questions of whose past, whose heritage, and whose legitimation to define.¹² One critical argument is that only authorised institutions and experts, such as heritage authorities, are involved in selecting and assessing objects in the present and defining them for us all as our given past. In contrast, John Pendlebury and other scholars highlight heritage as an assemblage of objects, regulations, and practices by both the professional heritage community and civil society. Recent concepts argue explicitly that diverse actors are part of heritage processes, as for example in community-driven adaptive heritage reuse (AHR),¹³ or in the management of change.¹⁴ The German conservator Hans-Rudolf Meier explains that a plurality of values enables conservation opportunities among larger networks of actors: “[...] the value of open, value-plural and value-reflective heritage conservation [lies] in recognising not only the diversity of conservation values, but also [in] the diversity of conservation motivations and ultimately conservation opportunities. This also opens up new perspectives for official heritage conservation [...] as part – and anchor – of heritage conservation as a diverse, open network that aims [...] to preserve cultural diversity.”¹⁵ In addition to these opportunities,

any plurality of values and actors is also accompanied by conflict and criticism, and hence a need for rational resolutions to such tensions, e.g., resolving conflicting perspectives on heritage.

Management of Change

Values and assessment follow differing priorities depending on the perspectives of various actors. They are group-specific, compete for priority, and reflect the struggle for the sovereignty of interpretation.¹⁶ However, we agree that values and the process of assessing are constitutive for heritage identification and management. Conflicts among actors thereby reflect conflicts of values.¹⁷ Management of change is one such rationalised form of negotiation: a guided process of balanced decision-making on interventions in built heritage. The core idea is to reflect comprehensibly and explicitly what we do when assessing and (in some cases) changing heritage objects.¹⁸

The Austrian conservator Bernd Euler-Rolle suggests a decision-making matrix that reflects the *Guidelines for the Conservation of Places of Cultural Significance – the Burra Charter* (1999).¹⁹ Both matrix and guidelines describe the interrelation of assessment and decision-making on heritage changes as a form of value-based management. The decision-making matrix offers a reliable framework for the integration of multiple actors, and allows an interactive process without losing sight of the assessments and statements of significance that define objects and places as heritage. The directed process highlights the interactive negotiation among different perspectives, subsequent options for change, and the potential impacts of resulting intervention. The impacts have to be weighed in regard to their effect in modifying the cultural significance of a monument: “The way the decision matrix works corresponds to a cycle of impacts between current heritage significance, changes, and new significance. What is essential here is the openness that changes to the artefacts can even strengthen certain heritage values.”²⁰ Reflecting heritage and democracy means that considered heritage values are contextualised by democratic ones. Systematisations for integrating different values, perspectives, and actors can help in rationalising these heritage conservation processes. The *Good Practice Wheel* (GPW)²¹ structures eight fields of action (conservation, (re-)use, community engagement, sustainable development and climate change, education, urban development, research,

and management) to demand explicit benefits of cooperative and collaborative action. Furthermore, the corresponding fields of expertise are brought into a “dialogue”.²² Here, value-conflicts are rationalised by seeking the potentials – rather than the risks²³ – through integrating plural perspectives in the management of change.

These instruments, of decision-matrix and *Good Practice Wheel*, help to institutionalise the management of change procedures. The idea to strengthen certain heritage values in these procedures should be in accordance with democratic principles and within the framework of greater institutionalised agreements such as constitutional laws and human rights if we understand heritage as a democratic process. One condition for successful management of change and of democracy is that the actors involved are qualified. This is no easy condition, as the instruments rest on statements concerning the significance of the heritage, which – especially in the European countries – is found in methods of art history. Otto Pächt and others (1977) highlight the inseparable connection of seeing, knowing, and perceiving;²⁴ however, not all actors are well educated in this field. Therefore, we have to think in two directions: First: The expertise of the professional heritage community lies in questions concerning the material, construction, appearance, etc. of objects: the *Dingfragen*. The task of professionals, including heritage authorities, is to explicitly and comprehensibly document and communicate such knowledge and values in procedures that assess heritage and manage its change. Second: The expertise of further actors can be structured and integrated along the GPW; e.g., first-hand expertise in using a heritage object (such as the inhabitants of a settlement) is likely to be important for the use and care, appropriate development, and research for understanding the place. Both need time, and this might be a further aspect to think about, since democracy in itself always needs time.

However, what do we do if actors such as the New Right attempt to misuse heritage procedures and objects for non-democratic values, programmes, and activities? Do professional heritage communities and civil society have the better argument for heritage corresponding to democratic principles? Values-based assessment and forms of management that are comprehensible, documented, and clearly communicated are central to framing and managing heritage as a democratic process.

Heritage in Democratic Processes

Popper’s Concept of The Open Society

Heritage and democracy lead us to the question of how to deal with the mandate for protecting difficult heritage and controversial monuments,²⁵ the original purpose (or some past function) of which violate people’s dignity or human rights more generally, as noted in the context of the *Black Lives Matter* movement and with monuments representing supporters of slavery. Thus, what to do when conflicts arise – as in the Vienna context, with monuments to anti-Semites – about altering, removing, or destroying such monuments?²⁶

Popper and Dahrendorf would both agree with heritage as organised democratic processes, but would also argue for heritage in democratic processes. Popper critically reflects, in his chapter *The Open Society and Its Enemies*, on the occidental society as rooted in Ancient Greece and Rome, which transitioned from a tribal to pluralistic mindset. In this context he neglects Plato’s utopian ideas of a state and elaborates links from utopia to oppression. In contrast to the Greek philosopher, Popper argues for a liberal society with individual freedom of choice and argument under a political regime of ongoing checks and balances and step-by-step responsiveness within social change, that are processes in which personal and professional responsibility has to be taken. Here, responsibility, criticism, and rational negotiation in the political-social sphere are central to limiting or avoiding aspects of totalitarian governance. Furthermore, Popper and Dahrendorf associate the Open Society with equality before the law and protection from oppression for each person.²⁷

What does this mean for conservation? Heritage in democratic processes allows for and demands *individual responsiveness*²⁸ and *responsibility*²⁹ in heritage institutions and in civil society, as well as *legitimised procedures*³⁰ that link different institutions, groups, and actors; *for criticism – and, if needed, rejection*³¹ – *of assessment and decision-making processes*, especially in science and academia; for sufficient access to initiate and participate in associated debates while *listening to all voices equally*; and finally, for considering the perspectives of those who feel wronged through statements or sentiments represented in monuments.

Important examples have been given of when individuals, initiatives, and communities have criticised controversial monuments and difficult heritage related to racism, as happened in the context of the



Fig. 1: Plaque of the Lueger monument, Vienna (2024).



Fig. 2: Art installation: Lueger temporär, Vienna (2023).

Black Lives Matter movement; or related to anti-Semitism, such as Vienna's statue of Karl Lueger (Fig. 2) (by Josef Müllner; designed 1913, erected 1926) on Doktor-Karl-Lueger-Platz or the bust of Josef Weinheber (by Josef Bock; designed 1940, erected 1975) on Schillerplatz (Fig. 3).

The monumentalisation of Karl Lueger, mayor of Vienna from 1897 to 1910, has been criticised since the 1970s for his proclaimed anti-Semitism. In 2009, a first competition was held to contextualise this heritage, with the winner proposing to tilt the statue slightly by 3.5 degrees. Reactions by the city's politicians followed the general positions of their respective parties. "The Greens were in favour of implementing the chosen proposal in the Vienna election campaign. Mayor Häupl (SPÖ) [Social Democratic Party of Austria] could not imagine a slanted position, but at least spoke out in favour of erecting an explanatory plaque at the memorial. The ÖVP [Austrian People's Party] emphasised the importance of historical contextualisation with regard to the anti-Semitism politically instrumentalised by Lueger, but at the same time expressly rejected a redesign or renaming. Not very surprisingly, the FPÖ demanded: 'The Lueger memorial must not be touched.'³² The Vienna heritage authorities expressed concerns regarding major impact on the appearance of the monument, which, due to their state mandate, has to be protected.

Following these proposals, nothing happened. In 2016 a plaque was installed by the city administration to memorise both Lueger's contributions and failures, yet making only very brief mention of his anti-Semitism and not mentioning that of Müllner at all (Fig. 1). Thus, criticism persisted, and in 2020 the monument was sprayed with graffiti saying 'Schande' (disgrace). Several civil society initiatives followed, such as the contextualising art project *Lueger temporär* from 2022 to 2023 (Fig. 2), conferences, petitions, and a performative guard of dishonour. In 2022–2023 a second competition was launched by the city, the same project won as in 2009, and the transformation of an upright statue into a slightly tilted one is underway. Nevertheless, loud criticism persists: that neither Lueger nor Müllner's anti-Semitism is explicitly addressed, and that the square and statue still memorialise Lueger.³³ Moreover, I ask what (if anything) would happen if the FPÖ was in power?

Josef Weinheber was an early member of the Nazi Party (NSDAP) since 1931 and a writer whose

lyrics honoured both the NS and Hitler himself; the artist Joseph Bock is known for portraying Hitler, and created a bust that was presented by the Wiener Tagblatt daily newspaper in April 1938, immediately after the ‘Anschluss’ (Germany’s annexation of Austria).³⁴ A bust of Weinheber, also created by Bock, was erected in Vienna’s Schillerplatz in 1975 by a private foundation. In 1991, the marble plinth was changed to granite and a new fundament was built to secure the monument. Since 2010, the *Plattform Geschichtspolitik*, a group of students and teachers of the *Academy of Arts*, has criticised this form of memorialisation of Weinheber. They exposed the fundament in 2013, metaphorically revealing the foundations of ongoing extreme right-wing positions in today’s society and raising awareness about the problematic and non-democratic background of both honoured persons (Fig. 3). Finally, in 2019 a plaque was installed through cooperation among the *Institut für Zeitgeschichte* (Institute for Contemporary History), *Universität Wien*, and the city of Vienna, which at least acknowledges the difficult heritage represented by Weinheber (Fig. 4).³⁵

In Bozen/Bolzano we note another form of visual and intellectual criticism of fascist architecture (Fig. 5). Waltraud Kofler-Engl reflected this case in more detail during the 2012 AKTLD conference.³⁶ Illuminated lettering, *Kein Mensch hat das Recht zu gehorchen/Nessuno ha il diritto di obbedire* [No-one has a right to obey] now disrupts the front façade of the former fascist party headquarters – today used as a tax office – and overwrites the NS visual programme and fascist slogan of *credere, obbedire, combattere (glauben, gehorchen, kämpfen)* [believe, obey, fight]. The installation is combined with an information block in the square. Both critically reflect the fascist heritage as well as demanding democratic norms, correspondent to the argumentations of Popper and Dahrendorf. In contrast, the fascist building opposite has continuously housed the courthouse, making it complicit in imposing the laws and ideologies of that regime, which until today has passed without comment.

Heritage Assessment and Management in Democracies

As the call of this conference states, “*Democracy is a fragile creature*”; and further, the political system is related to participation and empowerment of people. Popper and Dahrendorf argue that critique is needed in democracies, allowing for institution-

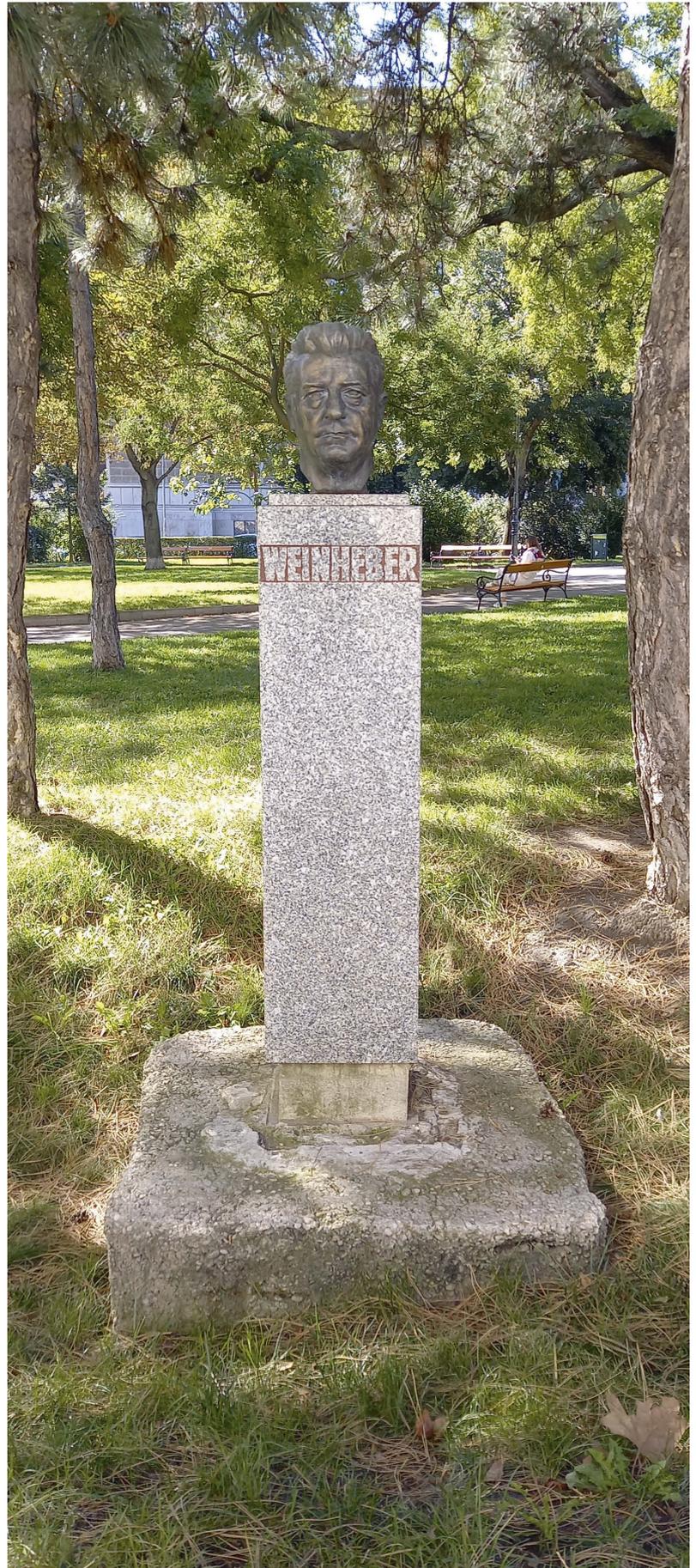


Fig. 3: Weinheber bust, Vienna (2024).

al improvements for the benefit of freedom, choice, and empowerment of people. Democratic values for heritage conservation are defined together with personal responsiveness and responsibility in institutions and civil society, and protection of those who are wronged. The *Black Lives Matter* movement has shown that there is a social need to reassess monuments that violate democratic values. The illuminated lettering, together with the information, at the former fascist (s.o.) party headquarters in Bozen/Bolzano translate the theoretical argument of Popper and Dahrendorf into heritage conservation practice and product.

Both intellectuals argue for criticism as a central constituting value of democracies; as the basis of democracy for change and greater participation; and for limiting or avoiding (aspects of) totalitarian governance, as we note today in Hungary and obviously in Russia. Criticism allows for reflection and, if necessary, can demonstrate that particular hypotheses (or decisions) are false or no longer tenable. However, there is a framework needed for criticism in heritage conservation: the juridification (rule of law) and institutionalisation of negotiation processes, which due to Popper and Dahrendorf I have called rationalisation.

From this follow two arguments: Society's acceptance that criticism needs both a legal framework and preparatory and follow-up expertise; and institutional understanding that expertise without (institutionalised forms of) participation jeopardises the acceptance of decisions and, ultimately, democracy as a whole.

Riegl's value-based assessment, the *Burra Charter*, and scholars constitute these aspects in heritage conservation. Instruments such as the decision matrix, the *Good Practice Wheel*, and others open opportunities for professional heritage communities

to organise heritage as a democratic process and to link top-down processes with bottom-up ones. Hereby, the Lueger case in particular shows the need to clarify the role of heritage authorities. Do they understand themselves as mediators in balancing conflicts between various stakeholders, or do they take agency for protecting cultural heritage with rational arguments? What if they do both?

These reflections are even more urgent in the context of aforementioned right-wing extremism. What happens when the enemies of the *Open Society* – of our democracies – claim a right to define, evaluate, and manage heritage and sites? An even greater challenge occurs when not only sections of civil society and political parties in opposition but instead elected representatives argue for non-democratic positions. What happens if not just heritage is at risk, but democracies? My argument for criticism is not one for criticism's sake, but for managing change, and the need to organise participation in rationalised processes of negotiation, which include the ability to comment on, change, and dismantle monuments. Furthermore, I argue – and this is slightly contradictory – for strengthening the role of professional heritage communities in heritage conservation procedures in the sense that they must take the lead in considering critics and plural voices when assessing and managing heritage, as part – and anchor – of heritage conservation as a diverse, open network, as Meier said. Heritage professionals are key actors in comprehensibly communicating the cultural significance of heritage objects and sites, and in rationalising those impacts that strengthen democratic heritage processes. Furthermore, they play a role in recognising and rejecting value attributions and narratives that promote totalitarian aspects, but they cannot secure heritage and democracy alone.



Fig. 4: Plaque of the Weinheber bust, Vienna (2024).



Fig. 5: Former Casa del Fascio, Bozen (2024).

Figures

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Endnotes

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Heritage and Democracy in Birmingham

A Report of the *Save Smallbrook* Campaign on the Case of Smallbrook Ringway Centre

JOE HOLYOAK

ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

In diesem Beitrag wird eine aktuelle Denkmalschutzinitiative in Birmingham, Großbritannien, vorgestellt. Sie befasst sich hauptsächlich mit zwei miteinander verbundenen Apellen: Erstens eine Bewusstseins-schaffung für die Architektur aus der Mitte des 20. Jahrhunderts und zweitens, dass Fragen des Kulturerbes von den lokalen Politiker*innen verantwortungsvoll und sachkundig behandelt werden sollten.

Das Gebäude, das im Mittelpunkt der Denkmalschutzkampagne steht, ist das *Smallbrook Ringway Centre*, ein vom Architekten James Roberts entworfenes Bürogebäude, das 1962 fertiggestellt wurde. Der Bauträger Commercial Estates Group (CEG) schlägt aktieöo vor, das Gebäude abzureißen und durch eine Hochhaussiedlung zu ersetzen. Der Beitrag beschreibt die Kampagne der Gruppe *Save Smallbrook*, die den Abriss des Gebäudes verhindern will. Die Kampagne stützt sich auf drei Argumente für den Erhalt des Gebäudes: die architektonischen und städtebaulichen Qualitäten des Gebäudes, die mit seinem Abriss und seiner Sanierung verbundenen Kohlenstoffemissionen, die zum Klimawandel beitragen, und der unzureichende Anteil an erschwinglichem Wohnraum, der in der geplanten Wohnanlage vorgesehen ist. Die Gruppe veröffentlichte einen Gegenentwurf, der aufzeigte, wie das bestehende Gebäude erhalten und zu Wohnzwecken umgenutzt werden könnte.

ABSTRACT

This paper presents a case study of a current conservation campaign in Birmingham, UK. It mainly addresses two related issues: First the idea that mid-20th-century architecture deserves to be seriously considered as heritage assets, and second that heritage issues should receive responsible and informed attention by elected local councillors who have the power to make important planning decisions.

The building at the centre of the conservation campaign is the Smallbrook Ringway Centre, an office building designed by the architect James Roberts that was completed in 1962. The developer *Commercial Estates Group* (CEG) proposes demolishing the building and replacing it with a high-rise residential development.

The paper describes the campaign by the group *Save Smallbrook*, aimed at preventing its demolition. The campaign is based on three arguments for retention: the architectural and urban design qualities of the building; the carbon emissions associated with its demolition and redevelopment, contributing to climate change; and the inadequate proportion of affordable housing envisioned in the proposed residential development. The group published a counter-scheme that showed how the existing building could be retained and converted to residential use.

The characteristics of the British planning system, different from those in European countries, are outlined. The paper describes the passage of the developer's planning application through the local planning committee, and its approval. The group employed a barrister to challenge the approval, which resulted in the planning committee being re-run. The barrister subsequently requested a judicial review of the decision in the High Court, which was refused. The campaign continues, but lacks legal representation. Nevertheless, its influence is evident in the recent unanimous rejection of a high-rise residential proposal on similar grounds, namely: effects on adjacent listed buildings, and the failure to incorporate sufficient affordable housing. Such a decision would have been extremely unlikely prior to the Smallbrook campaign.

The History of the Ringway

The Smallbrook Ringway Centre in Birmingham is a building comprising four floors of offices above a ground floor of shops, and was a major part of the first phase of the Inner Ring Road, which started construction in the 1950s. The building was designed by the Birmingham architect James Roberts, whose practice was located in the building after completion.

The Inner Ring Road was intended to reduce vehicle congestion and enable more efficient movement of traffic. It was planned from the 1930s onwards by City Engineer, Surveyor, and Planning Officer Herbert Manzoni. Manzoni held those combined posts from 1935 to 1963, and during that time changed the form of the city to an enormous degree. He advocated greater provision for private vehicles and had little regard for matters of architecture or heritage. He saw himself as a moderniser, and was given great power and authority in the planning of the city by his political masters.¹

When Manzoni took office, Birmingham had inherited a street layout in its centre that could not adequately accommodate the number of motor vehicles – cars, lorries, trams, and buses – that used it. It derived from an unplanned network of old streets, onto which an attempt had been made to impose order by designating one-way systems. This had the consequence of making legibility and movement more confusing. As well as local traffic, most long-distance through-traffic passed through the city centre, adding to congestion.

The city council acquired the necessary land for the Inner Ring Road through a legal mechanism called compulsory purchase orders (CPOs). The subsequent demolition and redevelopment greatly changed the form of the city centre. But the built form that accompanied the highway construction was mostly seen as secondary by Manzoni and elected councillors. The primary objective was the efficient movement of vehicles. The extent of land covered by CPOs, while large in total, was primarily determined by the highway alignment. The land available for construction, adjacent to the highway corridor, was mostly an incidental by-product of the highway planning (Fig. 1).²

Smallbrook Ringway and the Ringway Centre

The parcels of land left over from the planning of Smallbrook Ringway, which were to make up the site of the Smallbrook Ringway Centre, were bought

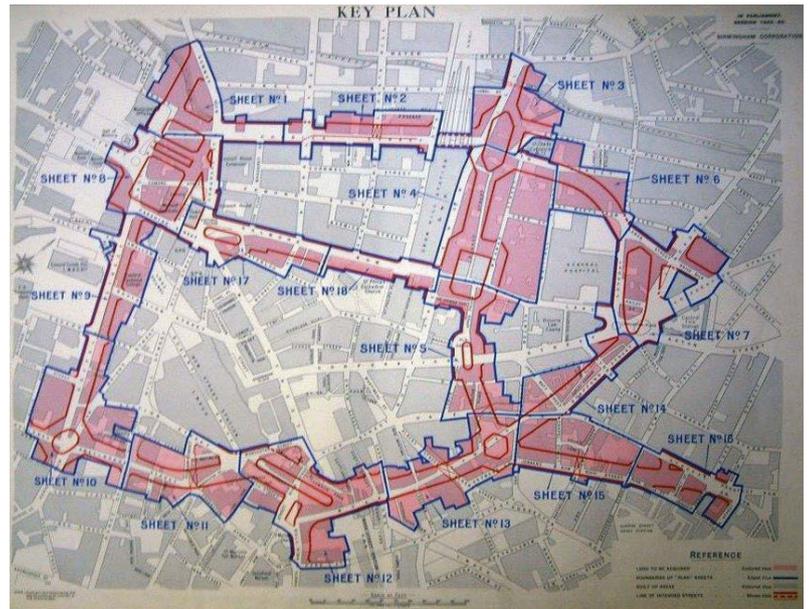


Fig. 1: Land compulsorily purchased for the Inner Ring Road. Smallbrook Ringway is at the bottom left (date unknown).

by Roberts' client, the developer Jo Godfrey, and assembled into an inconveniently long and narrow site. Roberts turned this limitation into an asset by designing a long and narrow, ribbon-like building, 270 metres in length, of great elegance.

Smallbrook Ringway, the first phase of the Inner Ring Road to be built, was unlike all later phases. It was the only part to be built as a conventional urban street: enclosed by buildings, flanked by pedestrian pavements with ground-floor shopfronts at the back of pavement. In 1959 it was heavily criticised in *The Architects' Journal* by Leslie Ginsberg, the eminent Head of the Birmingham School of Planning, as being old-fashioned “rather than a modern urban highway” (Fig. 2).³

The subsequent decades have proven Ginsberg diametrically wrong. The later phases, which were built as a modern urban highway detached from buildings and from the pedestrian realm, led to the Inner Ring Road being widely condemned as the “concrete collar”: strangling the city centre, restricting its growth, and condemning pedestrians to a mean and unpleasant environment.⁴ Those later phases have since been incrementally removed or redesigned. What is now Smallbrook Queensway is the only part of the Inner Ring Road that has proven to be sustainable.

Smallbrook Queensway is remarkable – not only in the context of the rest of the Inner Ring Road, but more widely – in the degree of unity that was achieved between the design of the highway and that



Fig. 2: Smallbrook Ringway around the time of completion (circa 1962).

of its architecture. Normally, these are two separate processes, carried out by different people at different times, whereas at Smallbrook there is a considerable synthesis between the two. The street is described by Andy Foster, author of the 2005 *Pevsner Architectural Guide* to Birmingham, as: “the best piece of mid-C20 urban design in the city”.⁵ Much of the credit for this is due to Roberts, who designed not only the Ringway Centre but also the adjacent Scala Cinema, the Albany Hotel opposite (now a Holiday Inn), and, further up the street, the landmark Rotunda office building, now Grade II listed and converted to apartments.⁶

I have elsewhere compared Smallbrook Queensway to Regent Street in London, where John Nash in the early 19th century (1813–1820) achieved a similar unity between a new highway and its architecture.⁷ Both streets were bold new interventions, cutting a new highway through an old pattern of small urban blocks and lining it with new architecture that matched the new scale of the highway. It is incidental, but appropriate, that both streets employ a distinct bend at their termination. The Ringway Centre accommodates this in an elegant concave curve, inflecting the building towards the Rotunda on the opposite side of the street.

The Ringway Centre has twice been proposed for statutory listing as a building of architectural or

historic interest, and twice been turned down.⁸ It is now 62 years old, well past the 30-year minimum age that the government conservation agency *Historic England* defines as the threshold for statutory listing. In fact, it is now prevented from being listed by a Certificate of Immunity acquired by its owner, CEG. The Centre is locally listed, which is a non-statutory status of significance determined by the local planning authority.⁹ In practice, this gives it little protection from demolition or inappropriate change.

It is still difficult for a modernist building from the mid-20th century to acquire statutory listed status. There are few successful examples in Birmingham. In the city centre, one can name only the Rotunda (1965), the New Street Station signal box (1965, a Brutalist building in precast concrete), and the Alpha Tower office building (1973). The Ringway Centre is, arguably, at least as architecturally significant as these. In addition – and in distinct contrast to Alpha Tower, which is overtly and deliberately an isolated object building, anti-urban in its indifference to its context – the Ringway Centre contributes positively to a successful urban design synthesis, as its evaluation in the Birmingham Pevsner book, quoted above, asserts.

It seems that periods of architecture pass through something that I call a *historical shadow*.

For a time after their period of production, buildings are appreciated for their contribution to the canon of architecture. Then a cloud passes over them, and they fall under a shadow that brings them into disrepute. Eventually, the cloud moves on, the shadow passes, and the architecture is appreciated by a new generation. Other arts, such as painting, music, and theatre, are also subject to this same historical shadow. However, architecture is different in that, during this period of under-appreciation, a building may be at threat of demolition – never to emerge from the shadow to renewed acclaim. The products of other arts may disappear from view, but they are seldomly destroyed and hence can be resurrected.

Georgian architecture, now widely admired, fell under the same shadow during Victorian times, and large amounts of it were demolished.¹⁰ Similarly, 19th-century architecture was widely dismissed from the 1950s to the 1980s and much was demolished. Today, the qualities of Victorian architecture are once again appreciated by a new generation, but much has been lost. Today, it is architecture of the mid-20th century that is obscured by the shadow. For that reason, buildings of that period struggle to find support for statutory listing. The Ringway Centre is a fine building and, if it could survive another 25 years, I am confident that its qualities would be recognised and that it would be added to the statu-

tory list. But because those qualities are currently obscured by the historical shadow, its survival is far from certain.¹¹

The Threat to the Ringway Centre

The threat to the Ringway Centre comes from its owner, CEG, which proposes demolishing the building and replacing it with a residential development. The nature of the development economy has changed greatly in recent years. There is now only a small amount of new office building in the city centre, as the demand for offices is much reduced. Instead, a great amount of new residential construction is taking its place, much of it in the form of high-rise towers. The majority of this residential development is one- and two-bedroom apartments, whether for sale, for rent, or as student accommodation. Very little of it addresses the widespread need for family accommodation. There is a great disparity between housing need and what the private sector chooses to build, and the planning system is incapable of giving appropriate direction to developers to bring the two together.¹²

CEG initially proposed the demolition of one half of the Ringway Centre building, and its replacement by a medium-rise building and one tower. The other half of the existing building was to be reconstructed and extended upwards. This scheme was given planning approval in 2017. The proposal was opposed by



Fig. 3: The residential scheme proposed by developer CEG (2023).

myself, a columnist for the *Birmingham Post*, and by the *Brutiful Birmingham* group of activists, who also write a column on 20th-century architecture in the same newspaper.¹³ We were all dismayed by the proposed demolition of an outstanding element of the city's modernist heritage.

That planning approval was not implemented, but it was followed in 2022 by a more extensive planning application by CEG, involving: the complete demolition of James Roberts' building, and its replacement by a new residential development containing 1,750 apartments. This would include three high-rise towers, of 44, 48, and 56 storeys (Fig. 3). The opposition formed itself into a campaign group named *Save Smallbrook*, a coalition comprising *Brutiful Birmingham*, *Birmingham Modernist Society*, the *Twentieth Century Society*, and *Zero Carbon House*. The coalition was later joined by the *Birmingham Fair Housing Campaign*.

Opposition to the Proposed Redevelopment

The group's campaign brought together three strands of opposition to the developer's proposal: heritage, carbon emissions, and housing provision. Firstly, it is an outstanding work of architecture, and makes a major contribution to a distinctive and

prominent example of modernist urban design. Secondly, its demolition and the subsequent redevelopment would result in significant emissions estimated as equivalent to 187 million kilogrammes of carbon dioxide.¹⁴ This would contribute to climate change and therefore be contrary both to national policy and to Birmingham's *Towards Net Zero* policy, which aims to reduce carbon emissions by 60% by 2027.¹⁵ Tall buildings over 20 storeys generate disproportionately large amounts of carbon emissions: up to 2.5 times the amount per unit of floorspace, compared with a building with fewer than seven storeys.¹⁶ Thirdly, the proposed redevelopment makes minimal contribution to the most pressing area of housing need: family-sized housing with three bedrooms or more.¹⁷ The proposed redevelopment is largely of one- and two-bedroomed apartments, with a 4.4% allocation of "affordable" units (compared to a city council minimum threshold figure of 35%, which in practice is never achieved).¹⁸ The proposal does not include any social rented housing.

Save Smallbrook was not content with simply opposing the CEG proposal, but decided it was necessary to demonstrate that there was an alternative. Mike Dring of *Birmingham Modernist Society* prepared a counter-scheme on the principle of retrofit:

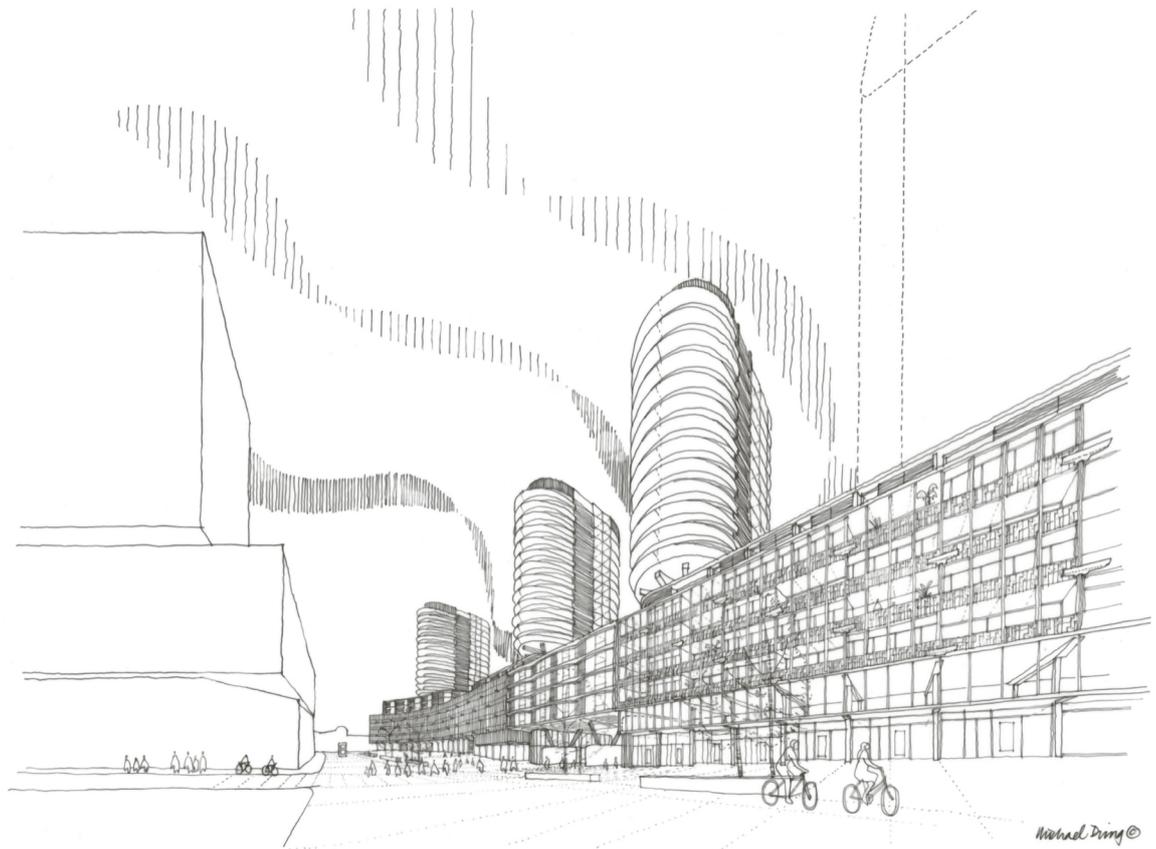


Fig. 4: The *Save Smallbrook* counter-scheme designed by Mike Dring (2023).

retaining the existing building, converting it to residential use, and increasing its commercial viability by adding three new buildings on top. These were shaped so as to be evocative of the Rotunda. (Fig. 4). The retrofit alternative did not equal the floorspace of the CEG proposal, of course, but in terms of the ratio of input to output (measured in terms of both usable floorspace and carbon emissions) it was far more efficient.

The counter-scheme was widely published, locally and nationally, both in the general press and in professional architecture- and planning-related publications, and gathered a wide degree of support for the campaign. A petition in support was signed by thousands of people, including three past winners of the Stirling Prize, the UK's premier award for new architecture. A company called Doberman Documentaries made a film about the campaign, which was included in the 2024 Flatpack film festival in Birmingham.¹⁹ At its premiere in August 2024, we were joined by another supporter, Kevin McCloud, who is well-known as the presenter of *Grand Designs*, a long-running TV series on the making of modern houses, shown nationally on Channel 4.²⁰

The argument that demolition and new development exacerbates the climate crisis, which ultimately threatens life on Earth, is a compelling one. But it is a recent addition to the list of material considerations that may determine a planning application. It has therefore taken time to be established as a criterion in planning, and to become part of case law. Also, it is a very technical matter, fully understood only by experts, and the large numbers involved are open to being misunderstood and misinterpreted.²¹

The Smallbrook case was assisted by the concurrent case of the *Marks and Spencer* building on London's Oxford Street, which received a lot of national publicity. *Marks and Spencer* wished to demolish their large Edwardian building and replace it with a new one. Their planning application was called in for determination by the then Secretary of State in the Conservative government, Michael Gove, on the grounds of its negative consequences for greenhouse gas emissions. His decision to refuse permission was first rejected by the High Court and later by the Secretary of State in the new Labour government in 2024.²² But the publicity brought the arguments about carbon release to wide public attention.

Despite the opposition to the Smallbrook proposed redevelopment, and despite all the positive

publicity given to the alternative, the planning application went before Birmingham's Planning Committee in September 2023, with a recommendation from the case officer that it be approved. Here, perhaps, it is necessary to say something about the British planning system, which differs from those of other European countries.

Britain has a planning system that is described as discretionary.²³ That is, although there are policies and guidance at both national and local levels, which seek to define what acceptable development should be, decisions about development are made on a case-by-case basis. Each case is judged on its own merits, rather than being measured against a firm design code. This introduces uncertainty into the system, as it is often difficult to predict whether or not a proposed development will be approved.

Decisions on important planning applications, such as that of the Ringway Centre, are taken by a planning committee of local elected councillors.²⁴ So the decisions made are democratic, in that the councillors are elected and publicly accountable, but they are not necessarily well informed. Councillors are given little education in planning and heritage matters, and in the committee they may well be influenced by issues other than those that should determine planning applications.

The September 2023 meeting of the Birmingham City Council Planning Committee approved the planning application by CEG by the narrowest margin of seven votes to six. Two members were absent from the meeting. The Chair, a declared ally of conservation, voted against the application. The planning case officer, in her report to the committee, devoted a lot of space to the carbon calculations but finally concluded in favour of the applicant. Particularly dismaying was the amount of uninformed prejudicial comment concerning the architecture of the Ringway Centre, made by councillors in the meeting. Comments included "architecturally ugly", "a concrete mess", "ugly, a monstrosity", and "historic only as in old and outdated".²⁵ The historical shadow under which mid-20th-century architecture is obscured was made evident. These demonstrated that, in the eyes of elected councillors taking important planning decisions, mid-20th-century architecture is not seen as significant.

One simple statement made by a councillor was particularly significant: "I don't like the building".²⁶ The personal aesthetic preferences of elected members should not be a legitimate basis on which to

make decisions. Decisions should instead be based on the arguments of the case put forward, on relevant policies, and in consideration of the opposition case. Yet this statement revealed the shaky basis on which the decision was made. It was also very striking that, despite the centrality of the *carbon* argument to the case, the word carbon was not spoken once by any councillor during the entire meeting.

Birmingham City Council has a *Towards Net Zero* policy that aims to shape and influence all other council policies and decisions towards a responsible, collective stance on the existential threat posed by climate change.²⁷ The policy commits the council and the city to achieving net zero carbon emissions by 2030, or as soon as possible thereafter.

Yet, this meeting of the planning committee gives the impression that either the elected councillors were unaware of the policy or, perhaps more likely, did not understand the issues to the extent of being able to incorporate them into a rationale for taking a decision.

The Save Smallbrook campaign group decided that it would need legal advice if it was to challenge the planning committee decision. It engaged Estelle Dehon KC (Cornerstone Barristers, London), an eminent barrister specialising in planning and environmental law. In order to pay her fees, and in anticipation of a possible claim for costs from the applicants, Save Smallbrook started a crowdfunding campaign with a target of raising £15,000.

Estelle Dehon submitted a formal case to the city council that the planning committee had been misled in two different ways, and requested that the meeting be held a second time. Her two objections were, firstly, that the facts about carbon emissions had been misrepresented in the case officer's report; and, secondly, that the heritage advice from *Historic England* had been misrepresented in the meeting and not been corrected. *Historic England* is the government agency that deals with matters of conservation of historic buildings. It was stated in the meeting that Historic England had made no objection to the demolition of the Ringway Centre, whereas in fact it had.²⁸

The city council agreed that the planning application should be heard again at a second planning committee meeting – a very unusual procedure. The planning committee met again in February

2024. The vote was again in support of the planning application, this time by seven votes to four.

The seven who previously voted for the application again supported it, whereas two of those who previously voted against were absent. The figures demonstrate the unpredictability of the planning committee process: an important vote can depend upon who turns up on the day.

Save Smallbrook decided to challenge the planning committee's decision in the High Court, requesting a judicial review of the decision. Estelle Dehon's advice was that the chance of success was about 50:50. She advised that, of *Save Smallbrook's* three grounds for opposition, the carbon argument had the greatest potential to succeed. A request for a judicial review takes place in two stages. The initial stage is to have the request considered, before it is determined. This was heard in the High Court in London in September 2024. The result was very disappointing. Dehon presented *Save Smallbrook's* case, but it appeared that the judge had already determined to refuse it (the refusal was already written and printed).

With this refusal, *Save Smallbrook* decided not to continue its legal opposition. Success was looking increasingly unlikely, which meant that the financial risk had become too great. The campaign will continue, but without legal representation. At the time of writing, in December 2024, the direction that the opposition will take is uncertain. What is certain is that the Smallbrook campaign, although so far unsuccessful, has had significant effects on the culture of planning in Birmingham. One recent illustration is the decision in November 2024 by the planning committee (whose membership has been strengthened by new appointments since the Smallbrook decisions) to refuse, by a unanimous vote, another high-rise residential development in the city centre. The reasons were a combination of heritage issues – there are listed buildings adjacent to the site – and the failure to provide sufficient affordable housing in the proposed development. It is extremely unlikely that such a vote would have happened before the Smallbrook campaign. Such is the uncertainty inherent in the democratic process of putting important decisions on heritage assets in the hands of elected councillors who are given little specialised training.

Figures

- 1 *City of Birmingham.*
- 2 Phyllis Nicklin, *University of Birmingham.*
- 3 *Corstorphine and Wright.*
- 4 *Save Smallbrook.*

Endnotes

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Commemorating the Democratisation or Democratising the Commemoration

Contemporary Debates Surrounding the “Memory Spaces” of the May 18 Gwangju Uprising

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In Südkorea besteht eine anhaltende Debatte über das kulturelle Erbe im Zusammenhang mit dem Gwangju-Aufstand, einem Schlüsselereignis der politischen Demokratisierung des Landes. Diese Kontroverse betrifft die Ernennung von Orten des Widerstands für Freiheit und Demokratie zum Weltkulturerbe. Der Gwangju-Aufstand war eine soziale Bewegung, die sich gegen die Militärdiktatur in Südkorea richtete und am 18. Mai 1980 in einem Massaker an der Zivilbevölkerung gipfelte. Seit der Demokratisierung Südkoreas im Jahr 1987 bemühen sich sowohl die Regierung als auch die Zivilgesellschaft um die Aufarbeitung des staatlich gelenkten Massakers, mit dem die Demokratisierungsbewegung unterdrückt wurde sowie um das Gedenken an die Opfer. Im Jahr 2011 nahm die UNESCO den Vorfall und dessen Aufarbeitung in ihr Register *Memory of the World* auf, was eine Untersuchung über die Rolle der *Erinnerungsräume* bei der Förderung demokratischer Werte auslöste.

In diesem Beitrag werden die Spannungen im Zusammenhang mit der Etablierung demokratischer Erinnerungskulturen anhand der für den Gwangju-Aufstand relevanten *Erinnerungsräume* untersucht. Es wird erörtert, wie diese Orte und die ihnen innewohnenden Narrative demokratische Erinnerungsräume innerhalb der Zivilgesellschaft geschaffen haben. Der Nationalfriedhof des 18. Mai, der außerhalb des Stadtkerns von Gwangju liegt, lädt beispielsweise zu Debatten über die *Heroisierung* der Opfer ein. Darüber hinaus löst die laufende Restaurierung der *Erinnerungsorte* – einschließlich des Stadtzentrums und des ehemaligen Gebäudes der Provinzverwaltung von Jeonnam, in dem Spezialeinheiten der Regierung viele Bürger*innen töteten – eine Kontroverse über die Nutzung des Raums für städtische Kultureinrichtungen und die Erinnerung an die historischen Ereignisse aus.

ABSTRACT

South Koreans are witnessing an ongoing debate surrounding cultural heritage associated with the Gwangju Uprising, a key event in the country’s political democratisation. This controversy concerns the designation of spaces of resistance for freedom and democracy as World Heritage Sites. The Gwangju Uprising was a social movement that challenged South Korea’s military dictatorship, culminating in a massacre of civilians on May 18, 1980. Since South Korea’s democratisation in 1987, both government and civil society have endeavoured to come to terms with the state-led massacre that suppressed the democratisation movement, and to commemorate the victims. In 2011, the UNESCO *Memory of the World Register* recognised the documentation of the incident and its truth and reconciliation process, which prompted an inquiry into the role of the *memory spaces* in fostering democratic values.

This paper explores the tensions surrounding the establishment of democratic memory cultures through the *memory spaces* relevant to the Gwangju Uprising. It discusses how these spaces and inherent narratives forged democratic memory cultures within post-democratisation civil society. For instance, the May 18 National Cemetery, situated outside Gwangju’s urban core and marked by monumental structures, invites debates on the *heroisation* of the victims, potentially seen as ritual efforts to pacify the spirits of the deceased. In addition, ongoing renovation of the *memory spaces* – including the city centre and the former Jeonnam Provincial Administration building, where governmental special forces killed many citizens – triggered controversy over the usage of space for urban cultural facilities versus memorialisation of the historical events.



Fig. 1. The Chumotap monument, May 18th National Cemetery.

Introduction¹

Chun Doo-hwan, formerly the fifth president of South Korea, remained unapologetic toward the victims of the *Gwangju Massacre* until his death on 23 November 2023, a stance that continued to draw criticism.² New York Times reporter Choe Sang-Hun described Chun as “South Korea’s most vilified former military dictator...”³ who brutally suppressed pro-democracy protesters after seizing power through a military coup in December 1979. His death shed light on the Gwangju Democratic Movement, also known as the “Gwangju Massacre”,⁴ which was a turning point in the emergence of civil society against the authoritarian regime and, in turn, in South Korea’s political democratisation.

The memory culture surrounding the Gwangju Uprising still faces numerous challenges today. This paper explores the tensions surrounding the establishment of democratic memory cultures through the *memory spaces* relevant to the Gwangju Uprising. In doing so, it suggests how South Korea(ns) can create a *democratic memory culture* of the Gwangju Uprising by using the heritages relevant to civil solidarity.

First, this paper introduces the history of the Gwangju Uprising and the way South Koreans commemorate the event. It then points out the ongoing

problems of the *memory spaces* of the Gwangju Uprising, which especially reinforce a nationalistic understanding of the event. These issues are palpable in two important *memory spaces*: the May 18 National Cemetery, and the former Jeonnam Provincial Office buildings. Lastly, it concludes with some suggestions for utilising this cultural heritage in ways that demonstrate the solidarity shown by citizens during the uprising, to create a *democratic memory culture* of the Gwangju Uprising. Using these spaces could help overcome the current nationalistic memory culture, which focuses predominantly on the armed fighters who were killed or captured at the former Provincial Office building on the last day of the uprising.

History of the Gwangju Uprising and its National Recognition

The Ministry of Patriots and Veterans Affairs uses the term “May 18th Gwangju Democratisation Movement” and defines the event as a “civil uprising that resisted the military junta and demanded democratisation, which took place in Gwangju on 18 May 1980.”⁵ A civilian militia comprising students and other citizens was established to resist the violent military dictatorship of Chun Doo-hwan, and

occupied sites including the Jeonnam Provincial Office administrative building until being brutally suppressed by Special Forces paratrooper brigades on 27 May 1980.

Following the arrest, torture, and killing of protesters and other civilians by the military dictatorship, it took almost two decades until South Korea's subsequent democratic government officially recognised the Gwangju Uprising as a democratisation movement, and the victims and participants could receive benefits as persons of national merit.⁶ In the 1980s and early 1990s, the Gwangju Uprising served as a symbol of resistance among anti-dictatorship activists, as they gathered at the victims' cemetery to demonstrate solidarity and readiness to succeed the *spirit* of the Gwangju Uprising.⁷

The reasons for the Gwangju Uprising include the rejection by *Chonnam* University students of the imposition of martial law on 17 May 1980. Chun Doo-hwan, commander of the Security Command, forced President Choi Kyu-hah to extend martial law to the entire nation, which included the closure of universities and the prohibition of political activities. Although government forces then violently suppressed protests, the students and citizens continued their resistance and demanded political democracy. The protests entered a new phase when the military fired on a crowd that had gathered in front of the former *Jeonnam Provincial Office*. In response, Gwangju citizens organised civilian militias that temporarily forced the army to vacate the city. Civil resistance continued until dawn on May 27, when the Martial Law Command mobilised Special Forces brigades, culminating in the defeat of the civilian militia that had occupied the Provincial Office Building.

Following political democratisation in June 1987, activists endeavoured to gain acknowledgement of the Gwangju Uprising as a threshold of democratic reforms. This public pressure led the South Korean National Assembly to pass a Special Law in 1995 to compensate the victims and commemorate the Gwangju Uprising.⁸ The new laws also enabled the construction of a national cemetery and eventually recognised the victims and survivors as persons of national merit.

Nationalistic Appropriation of the Gwangju Uprising

The Gwangju Uprising had been a symbol of resistance among democratic activists during the 1980s,

and in the 1990s the government officially recognised it as a democratisation movement rather than a local insurrection or violent uprising. This shift eventually incorporated the Gwangju Uprising into South Korean official memory in the 21st century. The official memory embraced the nationalistic interpretation of the Gwangju Uprising, as some former activists became liberal politicians following democratisation in 1987. These politicians appropriated the anti-US sentiment expressed by Gwangju citizens in May 1980, who had mistakenly expected the US government to engage with the situation and prevent violent suppression.⁹ Although it is still disputed whether the US attempted to prevent the killings in Gwangju, many anti-government activists accused the US government of supporting Chun's dictatorship and its violent military operations in Gwangju. Such perception shaped anti-US sentiment among South Korean student activists in the 1980s and 1990s. During that period, some activists initiated a movement for unification with North Korea, which shared the antagonism felt toward the United States.¹⁰

As some former activists became policymakers following democratisation, their anti-US and pro-unification positions shaped the representation of the Gwangju Uprising, particularly in a nationalistic manner. This nationalistic appropriation also influenced the *memory spaces* of the Gwangju Uprising, which became filled with nationalist symbols. For instance, many students and activists referred to traditional clothing, language, and performance to describe their nationalism in the 1980s and the 1990s. This tendency was linked with the usage of "traditional culture" in post-colonial South Korea, where its tradition became a symbol of nationalism and "anti-West" values.¹¹ In other words, the nationalistic representation of the Gwangju Uprising refers to the anti-dictatorship and anti-US sentiment, consolidated with reference to *traditional aspects* in South Korea.

Relationship Between Nationalism and Architecture

The fact that former activists involved in the Gwangju Uprising highly valued *traditional aspects* of Korean culture influenced the contours of its *memory spaces*, which embody Korea's historical characteristics and demonstrate nationalist characteristics. Therefore, one should examine the entanglement between nationalism and architecture before analys-

ing *memory spaces*. Maurice Charland asserts that the narrative of nationalism enables the subjects of a nation to constitute themselves as a collective entity, establish themselves as a transhistorical subject through continuity with their ancestors, and embrace the illusion of freedom to preserve their unique language, customs, and religion.¹² Nationalist narratives are expressed through multifaceted approaches, with politics, literature, music, and art serving as their mediums. Among these, architecture functions as a crucial medium for expressing and disseminating nationalist narratives. Historically, architecture has conveyed power, status, and the identity of large, centralised states. With the emergence of modern nation-states, architecture has become a significant tool for nationalist expression.¹³

According to Eric Hobsbawm, nationalism often arises from the resistance of traditional groups who feel threatened by modern advances.¹⁴ Such groups tend to reject modernity and turn to the past, and nationalist architecture typically embodies elements of a specific past in this context. Nationalist architecture symbolises pivotal national events, as well as the origins and destinies of nation-states.¹⁵ Edelman explains that it conveys to the people a belief in a heroic past and a hopeful future.¹⁶ These works possess narrative qualities that help us imagine nation-states.¹⁷ For this reason, Schwarzer defines architectural nationalism as “the design of a building according to considerations of how it represents or advances ideas of a nation.”¹⁸ This definition highlights that architecture goes beyond its role as a physical structure, and serves as a medium for visually embodying a nation’s narrative.

The Nationalist Aspect of the Gwangju Uprising Memory Spaces 1:

The May 18th National Cemetery

The May 18th National Cemetery embodies how the *memory spaces* of the Gwangju Uprising reflect its nationalist characteristics. The cemetery is a mass grave for the victims who lost their lives during and after the Gwangju Uprising. Construction began in 1993, and it was officially designated as a national cemetery in 2002. Managed by the Ministry of Patriots and Veterans Affairs, the cemetery incorporates various sculptures and buildings that symbolise elements representative of the Korean nation.¹⁹

First, the main architectural structures in the cemetery draw inspiration from traditional Korean royal and religious architecture. For instance, the



Fig. 2. Bronze sculpture, titled *Armed Rebellion Soldiers*.

40-meter-high *Chumotap* memorial tower at the centre of the cemetery is shaped like a flagpole [당간 *Danggan*] used in Buddhist temples, reflecting Korea’s historical connection to Buddhism.²⁰ The cemetery entrances, named the *Gate of Democracy* and the *Gate of History*, are modelled after the entrances to royal buildings from the Joseon Dynasty, Korea’s last dynastic kingdom.²¹ Additionally, the enshrined mausoleum in the northeast of the cemetery is designed to resemble a dolmen [고인돌 *Goindol*], an ancient megalithic tomb commonly found on the Korean Peninsula and traditionally associated with the burial of ancient kings.²² Although the participants in the democratisation movement were ordinary people unaffiliated with any royal family or religion, this traditional and authoritative architectural style serves as a medium to represent the defining characteristics of the Korean nation.

Meanwhile, Korean nationalist art does not simply adhere to traditional styles but also incorporates elements of Western art.²³ In the case of the May 18th National Cemetery, Western styles are incorporated to depict the history of resistance in Korea. For instance, the relief work titled *Seven Historical Courtyards*, which decorates the wall of *History Square* in the northwest of the cemetery, portrays key moments of resistance in Korean history.²⁴ This piece depicts the efforts of civilian forces resisting foreign invasions, such as during the Japanese and Manchu invasions in the 16th and 17th centuries respectively, as well as the anti-Japanese movements during the 19th- and 20th-century colonial period. Furthermore, it illustrates the history of Korea's democratisation movements, including the Gwangju Uprising, and ongoing efforts for the reunification of South and North Korea. These events are vividly expressed through numerous figures, conveying a powerful national narrative.

The sculptures *Armed Rebellion Soldiers* and *Great Harmony World* adopt Western-style bronze techniques to highlight the dynamism of the civilian army and the people during the Gwangju Uprising.²⁵ *Armed Rebellion Soldiers* depicts a few men gathered around the front of a vehicle, holding rifles, while another civilian soldier is seen embracing an injured comrade lying behind him. Similarly, in *Great Harmony World*, a strong man bares his upper body, revealing his muscular physique, as others behind him hold flags and drums, creating an uplifting and heroic atmosphere. These sculptures use triangular compositions typical of Western art, particularly works that depict historical battles and sacrifices. The exposed human forms and dynamic movements further dramatise the narrative of resistance, making the story of Korea's struggles appear even more poignant and compelling.

Korean scholars have evaluated the cemetery's memorials as a nationalist expression of the democratisation movement.²⁶ In other words, academic assessments of the May 18th National Cemetery align with critiques that it represents an authoritarian form of memory space. Scholars such as Choi Jung-Gi have argued that this space has not fully realised its potential to embody a democratic form of expression.²⁷ Such limitations hinder the development of a *democratic memory culture* that integrates the diverse memories of the various actors involved in the struggle.

In the process of incorporating the Gwangju Uprising into the nation's official memory, this cemetery was established under the management of the Ministry of Patriots and Veterans Affairs. This reflects the influence of the victims' desire to be recognised as patriots or war heroes. As a result, the cemetery predominantly focuses on a specific group of victims – the armed civilian militia – who are depicted as patriots and war heroes who saved the nation from dictatorship. In this context, traditional architectural elements and national symbols were employed uncritically to emphasise this narrative.

The Nationalist Aspect of the Gwangju Uprising Memory Spaces 2: The Restoration of the Jeonnam Provincial Office

This study also examines the history and restoration process of the Jeonnam Provincial Office building, which lies at the heart of the controversy surrounding the memory of the Gwangju Uprising. As the administrative centre of the Jeonnam region where the city of Gwangju is located, the building has undergone several extensions and modifications over time. The original structure, built in the 1910s during the Japanese colonial period, was a single-storey wooden building. In the 1930s, the main building was reinforced with brick and concrete, giving it its present-day appearance.²⁸ Since the 1970s, annexes and connecting buildings have been added to the main structure. During the 1980s, the building served as the headquarters of the pro-democracy movement and holds symbolic significance as the site of the final battle of the civilian militia during the Gwangju Uprising, where many lives were lost.²⁹

The controversy began after the Jeonnam provincial government relocated to another region in 1999, leaving the building and surrounding land vacant. Politicians proposed transforming Gwangju into a hub of Asian culture, and, since 2003, plans have been discussed to develop the unused building and its surroundings into the Asia Culture Center (ACC).³⁰ Following this plan, a new museum, research space, and theatre were constructed on the site of the former provincial government building to create urban cultural spaces. The main building, originally built during the colonial period, was preserved. A temporary structure was erected in front of the colonial-era main building to serve as the new entrance to the ACC, while the main building itself

was converted into a Memorial Hall and the ACC Visitor Center. Meanwhile, the annex building, added in the 1970s, was deemed to lack historical significance and was slated for demolition. Consequently, during the demolition process, key spaces used by the civilian militia – such as the broadcasting room and the situation room – were destroyed, erasing significant historical traces, including bullet marks left by military forces.

After 2008, as the construction of the Culture Center began in earnest, victims and bereaved families, concerned about the loss of historical traces, demanded the complete preservation of the annex building. In particular, they strongly advocated for its restoration to reflect its appearance during the 1980s at the time of the Gwangju Uprising. This request was approved in 2017 under the administration of former President Moon Jae-in. As of 2024, restoration work is underway, with efforts focused on recreating the building's 1980 appearance.³¹

Several factors motivated the victims and their families to call for the restoration of the annex building. One key reason is the recent rise of historical denialism regarding the Gwangju Uprising. Some pseudo-historians and far-right YouTube creators have falsely claimed that the civilian militia was a pro-North Korea and pro-communist operation rather than a pro-democracy, anti-dictatorship movement.³² The victims and their families voiced concerns over these accusations and sought to reaffirm the legitimacy of the Gwangju Uprising as a pro-democracy movement by restoring this main site where citizens battled government paratroopers on the final day of the uprising. They also emphasised the importance of fully restoring the building as a means of countering historical denialism.³³ However, critics argue that reconstructing a demolished building cannot fully restore its originality.³⁴ Moreover, the restoration process can be interpreted within the context of nationalist architectural activity. The restored buildings depict the most dramatic mo-



Fig. 3. The former Jeonnam Provincial Office before its restoration.



Fig. 4. The Red Cross Hospital, a space used to treat the wounded.

ments of the Gwangju Uprising, such as the killing of civilians by soldiers. This narrative of sacrificial heroism resonates with the public and aligns with the representation seen at the National Cemetery: a hero worthy of national honour.

The bereaved families' demand for restoration can be seen as a rational response to the absurd claims of far-right denialists. The newly constructed structure in front of the main building, together with the art and cultural spaces that encourage creative interpretations of history, may seem threatening to victims and their families. Consequently, they required a fixed depiction of the past that historical denialists could not manipulate, and restoration can serve this purpose.³⁵ Nevertheless, restoration is neither creative nor forward-looking. By returning to the past, this procedure leaves little room for critical or aesthetic interpretation as architectural artwork. In the process of reconstructing a falsified version of the past, architectural discourse becomes hollow.³⁶ The emphasis on the heroic narrative, appropriated by the victims, follows the logic of nationalist architecture, overshadowing other potential interpretations. Instead, there is a need for an alternative type of memory space – one that records and preserves

the damage and demolition process, allowing the site's history to transcend claims of heroism and nationalism.

Beyond the Narrative of Heroism and Nationalism

To summarise, one should reflect on the following points to discuss *memory spaces*, beyond the narrative of heroism and nationalism. First, the new interpretation should suggest a non-heroic perspective by which to understand the Gwangju Uprising. Beyond the civilian militia, various groups of people participated in the ten-day Democratisation Movement. For example, citizens shared food with one another, hid fellow citizens from soldiers, and treated the wounded. People have gradually witnessed growing interest in the roles of marginalised groups, such as secondary school students, women, and rag-pickers, during the Gwangju Uprising.³⁷ Various studies have examined their motivations for participation, their activities, and their lives after the uprising.³⁸ This emerging focus shifts attention away from the predominantly male militia and offers an alternative perspective that transcends the nationalist narrative of uniform heroism.

In this context, examining diverse *memory spaces* is essential to move beyond this nationalist narrative. Existing *memory spaces* often fail to acknowledge the citizens who, while not sacrificing their lives, stood in solidarity during the movement. For instance, hospitals that treated the injured during the uprising, or markets where people shared food with protesters, can provide a more nuanced and inclusive account of the Gwangju Uprising.³⁹ These spaces illuminate the core values of democracy – solidarity and empathy; and can also reveal a richer, more diverse history of the event. Nevertheless, these spaces remain neglected and their stories are not well presented to the public.

Conclusion:

Call for Democratic Memory Spaces

This paper examined the cultural heritages associated with the Gwangju Uprising of May 1980, a key event in the political democratisation of South Korea. The first part discussed the history of the Gwangju Uprising and the protracted campaign for its inclusion in South Korean national memory, which enabled the construction of a grand National Cemetery and the restoration of the old provincial government building. In the second part, this study identified several limitations in these commemorative spaces, including their predominant celebration of armed male militia as national heroes while marginalising

other participants such as women, secondary school students, and rag-pickers. Additionally, the process of creating these memorials has resulted in authoritarian architectural styles, less aesthetic innovation, and challenges in authentically restoring the past.

To address these limitations, this paper suggests overcoming nationalistic commemorations and establishing a *democratic memory culture* of the Gwangju Uprising. This kind of memory culture could be fostered, for instance, by incorporating the narratives of solidarity from previously marginalised actors. This transition of memory culture involves critically examining how a single and authoritative narrative of the uprising has dominated the previous memory culture.

In conclusion, a *democratic memory culture* could create broader scope for future generations to remember the Gwangju Uprising in diverse ways. Greater attention should be given to currently neglected heritage sites that embody civic solidarity, such as hospitals or markets. These spaces offer alternative reflections that emphasise the core values of democracy – solidarity, sacrifice, and empathy – while challenging dominant homogenised heroic narratives. In other words, the rich and multifaceted cultural heritage of the Gwangju Uprising can only be fully realised when democracy is deeply embedded within South Korea's *culture of memory*.

Figures

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Endnotes

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- 23 Much of East Asian and Korean architecture is often described as follows: Korean art has been Westernized, and some aspects of Korea's architectural heritage can be understood as a legacy of colonialism. This architectural blending occurred because Korean nationalism arose in response to Western imperialism and Japan's colonial rule. As Western powers expanded their imperial reach into East Asia, Joseon opened its ports in the 1870s and began embracing Western culture. This trend intensified during Japan's colonial rule over Korea, as Japan itself was undergoing Westernization. Japanese modern architecture frequently adopted neoclassical styles, a hallmark of nationalist Western art, and these styles were similarly introduced to the Korean Peninsula. Over time, Western artistic forms were integrated into the nationalist movement, shaping state authority and influencing the trajectory of Korean art history. However, it is important to emphasize that in many accounts, including the one above, Korean art is often described as merely being influenced by the West, which is a significant limitation. What must be noted in this description is that there is no such thing as a singular, unified Western architecture, and Korean art should not be dismissed as a poor replica of an original Western style. See Yasuhiko Nishizawa, *A Study of Japanese Colonial Architecture in East Asia*, in: *Constructing the Colonized Land*, London/New York 2014; Jin Sung Chun, *Imaginary Athens*, Berlin-Tokyo-Seoul: A Dissonant Cultural History of Memory and Architecture [상상의 아테네, 베를린·도쿄·서울: 기억과 건축이 빚어낸 불협화음의 문화사], Seoul 2015.

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Collective Gathering for an Inclusive Inventory

RETO WASSER, ORKUN KASAP

ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

Neben der Erhaltung von bereits geschützten Objekten gehört die Auswahl und Inventarisierung von zukünftigen Objekten zu den Kernaufgaben der Denkmalpflege. Dies spiegelt sich auch in der denkmalpflegerischen Lehre der Architekturstudent*innen an der ETH Zürich wider. Neben den Methoden der institutionellen Denkmalpflege untersuchen die Studierenden in der Lehrveranstaltung *Zukünftige Denkmäler* potenziell zu erhaltende Objekte und erfassen diese in Form eines Inventareintrags in einer Datenbank. Das Ergebnis ist eine umfangreiche Sammlung von über tausend Einträgen zu neueren (1980–2000) und neuen Bauten (nach 2000) in der Schweiz, die nicht nur über die Objekte selbst, sondern auch über die Auswahl- und Bewertungskriterien Auskunft gibt. Diese Sammlung gibt auch wertvolle Einblicke in die Wahrnehmungen und Wertvorstellungen der Generationen „Z“ und „Alpha“, welche die größte Gruppe der Kursteilnehmenden bilden.

Im Frühjahrssemester 2024 verlagert der Kurs unter dem Titel *Future Heritage* seinen Schwerpunkt auf die Identifizierung von Objekten und Erbe von Minderheiten, Randgruppen und Menschen ohne Lobby. Das Seminar war auch als wichtiger Teil des Vermittlungs- und Ausstellungsprojekts *A Future for whose Past?* konzipiert, das von ICOMOS Suisse und der ETH Zürich anlässlich des 50-jährigen Jubiläums des Europäischen Denkmalschutzjahres initiiert wurde. Das kollektive Wissen der vielfältigen Gruppe von 137 Studierenden wurde als demokratische Grundlage für die gemeinsame Diskussion eines inklusiven Inventars genutzt, das unter anderem auch Schutzobjekte für die queere Community, Personen mit Migrationshintergrund oder Obdachlose berücksichtigt. Dabei stützten sie sich auf politisch etablierte Inventare auf Bundes-, Kantons- und Gemeindeebene in der Schweiz und hinterfragten die bisher angewandten Auswahlkriterien, immer ausgehend vom zur Diskussion stehenden Objekt und versuchten, diese entsprechend zu erweitern.

ABSTRACT

Aside from the preservation of objects that already have protected status, one of the core tasks of monument preservation is the selection and inventory of future objects. This is also reflected in the teaching of monument preservation to architecture students at *ETH Zurich*. In addition to the methods of institutional monument preservation, students participating in the *“Future Monuments”* course investigate potential objects for preservation and register them in a database in the form of an inventory entry. The result is an extensive collection of over a thousand entries on recent (1980–2000) and very recent (post-2000) buildings in Switzerland, providing information not only on the objects themselves but also on the selection and evaluation criteria. This collection also provides valuable insights into the perceptions and values of the „Z“ and „Alpha“ generations, who make up the largest group of course participants to date.

In the spring semester 2024, under the title *“Future Heritage”*, the course shifted its focus to identifying objects and inheritance of minorities, marginalised groups, and people without a lobby. The seminar was also conceived as an important part of the outreach and exhibition project *“A Future for whose Past?”* that was initiated by *ICOMOS Suisse* and *ETH Zurich* to mark the 50th anniversary of the first *European Architectural Heritage Year*. The collective knowledge of the diverse group of 137 students was used as a democratic basis for the joint discussion of an inclusive inventory that also takes into account protected objects for the queer community, persons with migration background, and homeless people, among others. In doing so, they drew on politically established inventories at the federal, cantonal, and municipal levels in Switzerland and questioned the selection criteria currently applied, always starting from the object under discussion, and attempted to expand them appropriately.

A Future for Whose Past?

The motto of the *European Architectural Heritage Year 1975* was “*A Future for our Past*”. Fifty years later, in the face of the consequences of war, climate change, migration, communication technology revolutions, and civil and human rights activism, we are faced with the question of whose past is meant by „our“ and to what extent we can speak of a common past. The project „*A Future for Whose Past?*“, carried out by *ICOMOS Suisse* together with the *Chair of Construction Heritage and Preservation* at *ETH Zurich* and numerous other national and international partners, is foregrounding discussion of whose heritage is at stake and who decides or has a say in what is important for society to preserve for the sake of remembrance.

Although the project raises questions that are relevant at a broader societal level (e.g., how the memory and heritage of different disadvantaged groups are recognised and represented in a society undergoing an accelerated process of diversification), the focus is on monument preservation, the related mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion, and the different societal actors that play various roles in these processes. In this context, the discussion seeks to determine how specific knowledge and legal regimes define what is recognised as cultural heritage worthy of protection, which conditions have contributed to their formation, and whether heritage conservation practice can be thought of and practiced more inclusively from the perspectives of those who have been given only limited or no consideration. Such a discussion presupposes that the groups concerned participate in this discussion and contribute their views on the topic, their experiences, and of course the places and objects that they consider relevant.

During the course, architecture students were encouraged to develop an awareness of the different value layers and qualities embedded in the built environment – especially those that are less obvious than others – by discussing a wide range of objects in terms of their suitability for designation as monuments; and whether all relevant values are recognised for objects that are already protected. This enables students to develop an understanding of the complex social context within which they will operate in their future careers.

Description of the Teaching Project and Method

The “*Future Heritage*” teaching project was offered in the 2024 spring semester as a core seminar in the Master’s degree programme in Architecture at *ETH Zurich* as an adaptation – with a specific focus – of the “*Future Monuments*” course taught in the previous fall semester. Both courses are dedicated to teaching the theory, methods, and applied principles of monument preservation as a discipline, and incorporate selected writings, lectures, and guest contributions illustrating and discussing the subject matter over the course of the semester. The “*Future Heritage*” seminar focused on the relationship between tangible objects and the intangible heritage of minorities, marginalised groups, and people without a lobby. The students examined inventories at federal, cantonal, and municipal level within Switzerland, focusing on the selection and inventory of future protected objects rather than on the preservation of already designated monuments, although both are central tasks of monument preservation. One central question was which groups are currently excluded, consciously or unconsciously, by institutional monument preservation when deciding what heritage to preserve in the future.

The shift in the subject matter also required an adjustment to the teaching format. At the beginning of the semester, lectures were used to convey theoretical positions on heritage and the basics of practical monument preservation, which were supplemented by various guest lectures over the course of the semester. Florence Graezer Bideau, professor at *EPFL Lausanne*, gave an introduction to heritage studies and the topic of intangible heritage, while Rune Frandsen and Maria Kouvari from *ETH Zurich* and Helen Wyss, historian and architect, presented examples of minority heritage and their current recognition in their guest lectures. The most significant change to the format concerned the formation of working clusters, the distribution of students into different focus groups, and the discussion method. The 137 students were divided into smaller groups in order to approach the still-new subject area together in a seminar-like teaching environment. Together with the students, a list of possible types of discrimination was drawn up, including on grounds of skin colour, origin, religion, gender, sexual orientation, age, language, disability, and class. This also helped to define the associated minority interest groups. In the next step, based on this initial approach to the topic, the students were asked to

look for several related objects associated with one or more of the interest groups, to bring related image material, and to present them in the group, so that different objects or buildings and their associated interest groups could be discussed. This process allowed for the students to slowly develop positions and related arguments in favour of protecting of these objects, while also realising the challenges associated with doing so.

This teaching format was repeated in different constellations throughout the semester. The groups were initially structured according to interest groups such as origin or religion, and later in the semester they were divided according to building use. This mutual exchange enabled the students to gather a broad overview of relevant objects and arguments, and also learn the necessary content through discussion. At the end of the semester, each student was asked to compose an entry in the Future Heritage database for a particular object that they had selected in agreement with the teaching team. Each entry consisted of a detailed description of the object and an appraisal based on the discussions during the semester. The building description presents characteristic features such as history, urban design, architectural concept and specific features, construction, and current condition including any transformations of the building. In the appraisal, students were asked to formulate a clear argumentation regarding the building's status as a witness and its worthiness of future protection, with a focus on the significance of the property as the heritage of minorities, marginalised groups, or people without a lobby. The contributions recorded in the database were presented by the students to invited representatives of various interest groups at a joint closing event. The final event served to reflect, together with the invited guests, on a potential future inventory of protected objects.

The following section presents seven examples from the 137 extremely diverse submissions that students worked on as part of the semester described above. The examples retain the basic structure of the student submissions, starting with a building description and a subsequent appraisal. From a teaching perspective, the aim was to promote a scientific way of working. Nevertheless, the students employed different methods in conducting their independent research on the individual objects, for example, due to the lack of written or audio-visual material concerning the Albanian Mosque in Zu-

rich Seebach. As such, in addition to literature and archive research, the students' work also included inspecting the buildings, including photographic documentation and often verbal dialogue with protagonists and users on-site.

Escape Route Drainage Channel/Rohr Diepoldsau, Canton St. Gallen Student: Romina Züst

Diepoldsau is a Swiss municipality in the St. Gallen Rhine Valley and lies largely to the east of the regulated River Rhine. Since the 16th century, the river also marked the national border with Austria. Recurring floods in the 19th century led to the regulation of the river, and in 1923 the Rhine was diverted into a new riverbed, the "New Rhine," to the west of the natural course of the river. The original course of the river, the "Old Rhine," still forms the national border today.¹

As part of these measures, a drainage canal, the so-called "Rohr (Canal Pipe)", was built between Diepoldsau and the municipality of Lustenau, which lies on Austrian territory. The „Rohr“ collects the pressurised water from the New Rhine and diverts it under the Old Rhine to Vorarlberg, Austria. The canal pipe, half of which protrudes from the water, is 310 meters long and 2.5 meters high. It was constructed on-site from reinforced concrete using wooden formwork.^{2,3}

At the beginning of the Second World War, the Old Rhine was often just a narrow trickle, thereby providing a route for many Jews to flee to Switzerland. Initially, these refugees entered the country legally, but after Germany's annexation (Anschluss) of Austria in March 1938 the number of emigrants rose sharply. A refugee camp was set up in the municipality of Diepoldsau, from where many Jewish refugees made their way to other countries. After an entry ban was imposed and the border crossings were closed following Kristallnacht (November 1938), the border area was secured with barbed wire and monitored. A border gate was also installed on the canal pipe.⁴

The drainage canal played an important role in the escape of many people facing imminent persecution, as it was used as a crossing route over the Old Rhine. In addition to those using the canal to escape, people on both sides of the border helped the refugees. For many Jews during the Second World War, the "Rohr" thus marked the crossing to a safe country. Even though the main escape route



Fig. 1: Escape Route, barrier on drainage channel, Diepoldsau, Canton St. Gallen (2024).

ran along the natural border of the Old Rhine, many people used the “Rohr” to directly cross the border from Austria into Switzerland.⁵

Romina Züst emphasised that the “Rohr” has historical value and is part of Diepoldsau’s cultural heritage. To ensure that the events remain in people’s memories, the “Rohr” should be preserved as a local testimony to the past. It also pays tribute to the risky work of those assisting others to escape, who acted out of solidarity despite official prohibition. In remembrance of these tragic events, the memorial site should remain visible as a means to recognise the associated intangible heritage.

Musikpavillon (Music Pavilion) at Merkurplatz, Winterthur, Canton Zurich **Student: Emanuel Bosonnet**

The Musikpavillon (Music Pavilion) Merkurplatz was commissioned by the city of Winterthur in 1990 and designed by architect Arnold Amsler. It was erected in 1992 as part of the redesign of Merkurplatz in order to make the rather uninviting surroundings more attractive. The architect’s design idea was to incorporate the axis of the former Merkurstrasse as a historic entrance to the city.⁶ The pavilion, which

still stands today, is open and illuminated throughout, but is neither heated nor insulated, as auxiliary spaces such as storage, cloakrooms, and toilets were not implemented as planned. The structure consists of three parts: a platform, a cantilevered folded plate canopy, and a rear wall alongside which a curved bench offers additional recreational space. The rear wall is supported by eleven large steel L-beams that fan out to form a gentle curve. The top four segments of the rear wall are made of slightly translucent fiberglass, the lower two of sheet metal. Water is collected in a horizontal gutter over the roof and then runs off via a rain gutter at the back of the pavilion.

Emanuel Bosonnet describes the pavilion as a place originally intended for musical performances, but which became a meeting place for individuals in Winterthur facing issues of alcohol or drug dependency. This made the pavilion a symbol of the challenges and ways of dealing with social problems in the city. According to Bosonnet, the unrestricted accessibility and visibility of the pavilion indirectly enabled general awareness of the existence of marginalised people in the city. The gathering of those on the margins of society made the challenges of dealing with addicts visible and led to important po-

litical changes. At a socio-political level, this led to an improvement in low-threshold services for people with drug dependency in Winterthur. The pavilion thus represents the political and social learning process that accompanied the policies implemented in Switzerland as a response to issues concerning drug dependency.

The Musikpavillon should be preserved as a monument, as it is not only an architectural testimony to the city's history but also represents the versatile function of protecting the basic human needs of all the city's inhabitants. It offers protection from the weather, a place to rest, and a platform for social interaction.

**STEP d'Aire wastewater treatment plant,
Vernier Canton of Geneva
Student: Shirley Rellstab**

The "station d'épuration des eaux usées d'Aire" (STEP d'Aire) wastewater treatment plant is located on the western outskirts of Geneva, directly on the banks of the Rhône. It was planned between 1964

and 1967 by the engineer Heinz Weisz and the architect Georges Brera.⁷ The complex is embedded in the gently sloping landscape facing the Rhône. Brera's design aimed to find a common scale for the various buildings and to incorporate the terrain and green spaces. The complex's most visually striking structures are the administrative building (La Versaeuse) and sewage sludge treatment facility (Porteous).⁸ The Porteous rises some 10 m above the Rhône and is supported by five external concrete beams. The building is organised in three levels: the lowest level houses the landing stage and access for trucks; the middle level sewage sludge filtration and a thermal power plant; and sludge is dried on the upper level. In the 1990s, STEP d'Aire was restructured and the Porteous building was decommissioned. It stood empty for around 20 years until the "Prenons La Ville" (Occupy the City) collective occupied the building in the summer of 2018.⁹ The squatters and the cantonal council subsequently agreed to convert the building into a cultural centre. Since then, the former sewage treatment plant has been gradually renovated and prepared for its new use.¹⁰

Shirley Rellstab sees the STEP d'Aire as an important architectural and cultural heritage site. Architecturally, the plant is a contemporary witness to the 1960s, when the construction of sewage treatment plants presented a challenge as a new type of building task.¹¹ The design by Georges Brera and Heinz Weisz was groundbreaking for many subsequent projects and exemplifies the post-war trend for brutalist architecture in Geneva.¹² The ways in which the complex is integrated into the landscape and the buildings interact with their surroundings are also praised as outstanding. Since 2020, the Porteous, like the complex as a whole, has been on the city of Geneva's inventory of buildings worthy of protection. The building's recent past and current use as a cultural centre give it great cultural and social significance, and the occupation and conversion of the Porteous into a socio-cultural centre is a unique example of cooperation between activists, cultural workers, and public authorities, which presents itself as a model for the whole of Switzerland. The Porteous offers space for a diverse range of art, nature, sport, music, and leisure activities and is particularly valuable for young people and the alternative cultural scene in Geneva. The Porteous's legacy of squatting and the canton's support make it both an important part of Geneva's squatting history and a potential future heritage site for the squatter community.



Fig. 2: North facade, STEP d'Aire wastewater treatment plant, Vernier Canton, Geneva (2024).

Roads in Safiental, Safien Canton Graubünden Student: Clément Estreicher

During the Second World War, many soldiers of other nationalities found refuge in Switzerland. In June 1940, around 40,000 men from the 45th French Army Corps, including 12,000 from the 2nd Polish Jäger Division, fled to Switzerland via the Jura mountains.¹³ The Polish soldiers had to remain in Switzerland until the end of the war, while the French were able to return after a few months. The Polish internees were initially housed in the Büren an der Aare internment camp before being distributed to around 500 smaller camps throughout the country from 1941. They were put to work in construction and agricultural projects, and in total performed more than 8 million working days, including the construction of 450 km of roads and 63 bridges.¹⁴

The Swiss authorities deployed the internees in remote areas so as to avoid both competition with the local economy and also integration. Around fifteen road projects were undertaken in the canton of Graubünden, including six roads in the Safiental.¹⁵ The valley offered almost complete social isolation and at the same time the projects served Switzerland's military interests. The roads in question in the Safiental were mainly built from locally available material. The forest path from Stägä to Glasspass consists of flat stones set vertically into the ground to ensure stability, whereas the path from Turrahus over the Tomül Pass to Vals was partly dug into the mountainside with picks and shovels, resulting in artificial terracing. The Tomül Pass has been classified as a "historic transport route of local importance" and is protected due to its remaining original substance, including bridges and retaining walls.¹⁶ However, traces of the daily life of the interned soldiers have almost completely disappeared and the work camp under the Alperschällhorn was completely dismantled after the war.

One example of the "collective forgetting" of the internment of thousands of soldiers during the Second World War is the internment camp in Büren an der Aare. The land on which the camp stood was returned to its owners in 1946 and put back into agricultural use. Today, only the building of the former laundry remains. The descendants of the Poles interned in Switzerland have been campaigning for its preservation since 2018, although the Federal Council does not consider the laundry to be a building of national interest.¹⁷



Fig. 3: Path in Safiental, between Stägä and Glasspass, built from local limestone set vertically into the ground (2024).

According to Clément Estreicher, preserving the memory of the internment of soldiers and the associated architectural heritage is closely linked to Switzerland's identity, as the internment of soldiers in accordance with the Hague Convention and the equal treatment of all belligerent countries were central elements of Switzerland's policy of neutrality during the war.¹⁸ The preservation of these historical sites should therefore be considered of great importance, in addition to safeguarding the intangible heritage of Polish internees in Switzerland during the Second World War.

The Beast Skatepark, Zurich, Canton of Zurich Student: Elisa Nadas

In 2011, the city of Zurich granted the Stadionbrache Association permission to temporarily use and organise non-commercial activities on the site of the former Hardturm Stadium for three years until the completion of a new football stadium. The site cov-

ers more than three hectares and consists of a green space, the ruins of the stadium stands, and a large asphalt-covered area. In the southeastern part of the green space, the Zurich skateboard scene began building a DIY skatepark, including a concrete pool called the “Bowl”. Construction began in July 2011 and was carried out by the skaters themselves in the form of voluntary work.¹⁹ Bowls are a foundational feature of skateparks, since skateboarding was revolutionised in the 1970s when transposed to empty concrete swimming pools that featured rounded corners and transitions. Other modules such as a “quarter pipe,” kerbs, and spine feature were also added later.

The fact that the skatepark was built by the skaters themselves makes it uniquely authentic and symbolises the freedom and creativity of the skateboard community.²⁰ DIY projects like this are often an expression of resistance and independence from the norms of public space and offer a platform for personal and collective forms of expression.²¹ Elisa Nadas described the DIY skatepark on the site of the former Hardturm Stadium in Zurich as a remarkable example of the creative and independent use of public space by a community. As such, the skatepark is considered not just as monofunctional sports infrastructure, but also a cultural symbol. The “Bowl” is a unique

example of DIY culture in Zurich and has become an important place for the skateboard community, demonstrated by their commitment to the continuous development and expansion of the skatepark.²² Elisa Nadas also writes that the skatepark, as a future monument, could emphasise the importance of community appropriation and design of public spaces. It stands for the history and memories of the skateboard community in Zurich and contributes to the city’s cultural identity. Preserving the skatepark would preserve not only the physical structure, but also the values and culture it represents. The skatepark is a living example of the community’s ability to actively shape and use its environment, and should be recognised and protected as such.

Albanian Mosque, Zurich Seebach, Canton Zurich Student: Philipp Eitel

The Albanian mosque (Xhamia Shqiptare ne Seebach) run by the „Stiftung der Islamischen Jugend“ (Foundation of Islamic Youth), a member of the Association of Islamic Organizations in Zurich (VIOZ), is located on the first floor of a residential building at Seebacherstrasse 67 in the Seebach neighbourhood. The building was erected in 1947 as a masonry construction, with three floors and a basement. The first



Fig. 4: Prayer room, Albanian Mosque, Seebach, Zurich (2024).

floor of the building was converted into a mosque in 2002 and has two entrances, with the main one being on the western side. The northwest part of the first floor has an entrance room with seating and wall shelving, which is used as a sales area. There is an office on the western façade and a room with sanitary facilities for ritual foot-washing in the south-western corner. The eastern half of the building is used entirely as a prayer room. Although structural changes have been made, they do not interfere with the building's load-bearing structure. The prayer room contains the prayer niche (mihrāb), the pulpit (minbar), and a carpet with an Islamic pattern.²³

At 10.1%, the proportion of Muslims in the Seebach district is significantly higher than the average for the city of Zurich.²⁴ The mosque is a central place for practicing Islam in the Albanian language, especially for male members of the community. It is used six times a day for prayer and offers a Koran school once a week. The anteroom of the mosque is used as a salesroom, and the garden at the back is used for leisure activities, underlining the community-building function of the place.

Through direct exchange with the imam and other members of the community, Philipp Eitel found that the user group did not necessarily consider their mosque to be worthy of protection. According to them, only historical uniqueness or special craftsmanship would make it worthy of protection, which this mosque lacks. The preservation of the existing building plays a subordinate role for the user group. The mosque in Seebach is seen as a community that is not tied to one place. If the religious community moves to other premises, the current location loses its significance. Philipp Eitel also states that the subjective significance of the site for the user group is not the decisive factor when it comes to its worthiness of protection, but rather the wider context of dealing with the Muslim minority in Switzerland. The mosque reflects the religious community's engagement with its social environment. The appropriation of existing structures that are not in use enables the practice of Islam and the living out of the community, while deliberately avoiding visibility in public spaces. The structural interventions document the appropriation of the space and its conversion into a mosque. These interventions are unique and stand out from other conversions. The elements that are not firmly attached to the building structure, on the other hand, have no site-specific or artistic individuality and are not worthy of protection.

Le Saxo Bar, Lausanne, Canton of Vaud

Student: Luce Salvadé

Le Saxo, the oldest queer bar still operating in Lausanne, is located on the first floor of the *Banque Cantonale Vaudoise* administration building at Rue de la Grotte 3. The building, designed by architects Charles Brugger, Charles Thévenaz, and Marcel Maillard, who are known for many architecturally significant buildings in Lausanne, was constructed in 1947 as an extension to the original bank building.²⁵ It is arranged around an inner courtyard and adapts to the steep topography of the surrounding area. The first floor of the building houses various business premises, including the bar *Le Saxo*, which has been open since 1992. The bar was designed as a space for people of all sexual orientations, genders, and ages, and is known for its drag shows and karaoke nights. The bar's interior has hardly changed in the last three decades and is reminiscent of Parisian cabarets.

Luce Salvadé notes in her research that *Le Saxo* has played an important role for the queer community of Vaud canton since 1992.²⁶ The bar provided a safe space for people of different sexual orientations and gender identities and fostered the growth of the queer community in Lausanne.²⁷

Le Saxo's unaltered interior serves as a testament to Lausanne's vibrant queer past, which is slowly disappearing as a result of gentrification and increasing acceptance of the community in non-queer establishments. The architectural design of the space, with artwork and mirrors, emphasises the importance of style within the queer community and reflects the importance of self-expression and celebration in queer culture. The resilience of the bar and its patrons to the changing times emphasises the ongoing need for places where people of all sexual orientations and gender identities can come together, be accepted, and express themselves authentically.

While the architectural qualities of the building have already been deemed worthy of protection, the historical and social significance of *Le Saxo* to the queer community should be considered in any future assessment of its worthiness for protection. The preservation of facilities like *Le Saxo* is not only an architectural matter, but also an obligation to honour the history and identity of marginalised communities. By recognising the historical and cultural significance of *Le Saxo*, we reaffirm our commitment to a more just and compassionate society for all.

Collective Collecting

The teaching project proved to be a unique opportunity for students to engage intensively with the fundamental texts and methods of monument preservation and at the same time to actively challenge and question them in the context of the heritage of minorities. In many cases, the students dealt with objects that were either directly related to their own personal background; the places where they grew up or lived; or to social groups and related issues to which they are close or feel connected for various reasons. This motivated them and affected them personally. This discussion was the starting point for the exercise to coherently describe the objects in terms of their material and immaterial socio-cultural characteristics and to develop arguments in favour of their preservation. One challenge, of course, was the neutral and objective evaluation of the objects despite students' personal references.

Unlike in previous semesters, the students were not asked to develop a preservation strategy for the objects they investigated and assessed. More important than the question of what should still be protected and how they should be protected was the discussion about who should have a say in decision-making processes related to monument preservation and thus participate in the construction of a shared past. Nevertheless, discussions during the semester often centred on the question of whether and how objects or places that have become relevant through the use, appropriation, or relationship of one or more groups can be preserved in cases where the use no longer exists; where the object can no longer be used by the group itself for financial reasons or due to changed circumstances; or where protection would make it difficult or impossible for the groups concerned to continue using the object, to maintain their presence, and thus their heritage. In fact, these are fundamental questions that require further attention and research. As part of the course, this process enabled students to recognise the dif-

ferent decision-making criteria behind the inventory and protection of an object and to treat the built environment with more care – both in terms of its physical and intangible qualities.

The final reviews were accompanied by contributions from the guest reviewers Monica Bilfinger, art historian and General Secretary of *ICOMOS Suisse*; Dr. Florian Eitel, historian, anarchism researcher, and museum curator; Dr. Mattia Lento, theatre and film researcher, guest researcher “Seminar für Filmwissenschaft” *University of Zurich*; and Dr. Rune Frandsen, scientific researcher *Federal Office of Culture* (until January 2025), postdoctoral researcher *Construction Heritage & Preservation ETH Zurich*. The discussions provided an opportunity for further questions concerning protecting the heritage of minorities, and their inclusion within associated decision processes. What happens to the original fabric and its preservation – one of the cornerstones of Western theory of conservation – when other immaterial, historical, or other conflicting layers of relevance come into play and start to compete? What are the limits of democratic inclusion, especially when considering the heritage of politically controversial or even prohibited movements or groups? This last question emerged as relevant when it became clear that the overwhelming majority of the objects and groups observed by the students represented a progressive, multicultural, and inclusive understanding of society – one that is being challenged in Europe and many other parts of the world today more than in recent decades. For this very reason, the course was also an opportunity to motivate students to examine our shared past, engage with the most diverse and often under-represented groups in society, and to ask students to look beyond the tangible aspects of our built environment, revealing the often-complex relationship between democracy, representation, and heritage.

Figures

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- 2 Shirley Rellstab
- 3 Clement Estreicher
- 4 Philipp Eitel

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**HERITAGE
AND
POLITICS**

Heritage Champions and Democracy

Profiles of Conservation Activists in Iran

MINA DOURANDISH, SADRA MORADI GORGOUYEH, SOMAYEH FADAEI NEZHAD BAHRAMJERDI

ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

Im Iran werden umstrittene Entscheidungen über Veränderungen des kulturellen Erbes oft hinter verschlossenen Türen getroffen, ohne dass die Öffentlichkeit in nennenswertem Umfang konsultiert wird oder Abläufe transparent gemacht werden. Dies schränkt die Beteiligung der betroffenen Gemeinschaften, der lokalen Interessengruppen und der Expert*innen ein. Infolgedessen werden den verschiedenen Akteuren die Folgen dieser Entscheidungen erst dann bewusst, wenn die Regierung beginnt, sie in größerem und sichtbarerem Umfang umzusetzen, so dass wenig Raum für öffentliche Interventionen oder Einwände bleibt. Die Rolle der Expert*innen im Entscheidungsprozess bleibt in diesem undurchsichtigen und oft autoritären Umfeld unklar und sie spielen keine herausragende Rolle bei der Initiierung von Widerstand oder sozialer Mobilisierung gegen undemokratische Praktiken.

Stattdessen sind es Medienaktivist*innen, die diese Verfahren konsequent und mutig als Akteure des Wandels in Frage gestellt haben. Nach Ansicht vieler Fachmeinungen sind diese Aktivist*innen allmählich zu den wichtigsten Verfechter*innen der Demokratie im Bereich des Denkmalschutzes im Iran geworden. Während die Bedeutung der Rolle der Aktivist*innen und ihre langfristigen Auswirkungen auf die demokratischen Praktiken und die Erhaltung des Kulturerbes in der Literatur gut dokumentiert sind, wurde ihnen als Einzelpersonen nicht genügend Aufmerksamkeit geschenkt. Folglich wurden die Details ihrer täglichen Arbeit nicht angemessen untersucht, ihre Praktiken wurden nicht ausreichend reflektiert, und ihr Einfluss wurde nicht vollständig verstanden. In diesem Artikel wird mit Hilfe von qualitativen Forschungsmethoden und narrativen Instrumenten versucht, die Geschichten dieser Aktivist*innen aufzudecken, um zu zeigen, wie sie arbeiten und letztlich die bestehende Machtdynamik durchbrechen.

ABSTRACT

In Iran, controversial decisions regarding changes in heritage environments are often made behind closed doors, without significant public consultation or transparency. This limits the involvement of affected communities, local stakeholders, and experts. Consequently, various groups only become aware of the consequences of these decisions when the government begins implementing them on a broader and more visible scale, leaving little room for public intervention or objection. Although the role of experts in the decision-making process remains unclear in this obscure and often authoritarian environment, they do not play a prominent role in initiating resistance or social mobilisation against these undemocratic practices. Instead, it is media activists who have consistently and courageously challenged these procedures as *agents of change*. According to many experts, professionals, and officials, these activists have gradually become the main champions of democracy in the field of heritage conservation in Iran. While the significance of activists' roles and their long-term impact on democratic practices and heritage conservation has been well documented in the literature, they have received insufficient attention as individuals. Consequently, the details of their day-to-day efforts have not been adequately explored. In other words, their practices have not been sufficiently reflected upon, nor has their influence been fully understood. This article, utilising qualitative research methods and narrative-based tools, seeks to uncover the stories of these activists, to demonstrate how they operate and ultimately disrupt existing power dynamics.

Introduction

The conservation of heritage environments is often portrayed as a purely technical and managerial endeavour, disconnected from political considerations. This apolitical framing, echoed in Louis and Maertens' observation that even within international organisations, there is a frequent refrain of "we don't do politics", aligns with a broader trend of depoliticisation in decision making, particularly in the post-political era.¹ This era, which has emerged since the end of the Cold War, is characterised by declining voter turnout, decreasing membership of traditional political parties, and eroding public trust in politicians, all of which contribute to a rise in *anti-politics*. Theorists employ terms such as "post-democratic," Crouch (2004) "post-politics," Mouffe (2005) and "post-political" Rancière (2009) to describe a contemporary condition wherein genuine political contestation and conflicting worldviews are suppressed.² As Beveridge and Koch argue, this post-Cold War period has fostered a consensus-driven environment centred on global market norms, effectively silencing alternative perspectives, particularly those that challenge neoliberal ideologies.³ In this context, depoliticisation, defined by Burnham as "the process of placing at one remove the political character of decision-making", becomes a dominant governing strategy.⁴

Within heritage conservation, this depoliticisation manifests as a prioritisation of administrative solutions over engagement with the inherently political dimensions of heritage. Decisions regarding which heritage to preserve and how are deeply intertwined with societal values, power dynamics, and competing interests. Samuel emphasises the importance of political opportunities within arenas to the expression of heritage.⁵ Furthermore, Johns asserts that meaningful conservation must be understood as a political act.⁶ This study challenges this prevailing depoliticised approach by focusing on the significant political practices of Iranian heritage activists. These activists actively resist depoliticisation, engaging with and often influencing decision-making processes. Employing a narrative-based qualitative methodology, this research explores the lived experiences and strategies of these activists. By examining their narratives, the article aims to illuminate how they navigate the complex interplay of heritage, politics, and activism in Iran, utilising their resources to shape decisions and promote accountability. Ultimately, this investigation seeks to deepen

our understanding of these activists' operations and their contributions to democratising heritage conservation decision-making in Iran.

This article investigates how activism intersects with heritage conservation, focusing on the contributions of activists to preserving cultural heritage. By exploring their strategies and impacts, the study illuminates the ways in which activists navigate challenges and influence decisions to protect heritage within complex political contexts. Drawing on in-depth insights, it highlights the resources and mechanisms employed by activists to effectively address conservation issues and sustain their efforts.

Literature Review: Transforming Conservation and Challenging Power

The intersection of heritage studies and social movement theory has become increasingly crucial for understanding the evolving landscape of cultural heritage conservation. Scholars now widely recognise that heritage activism – often characterised by organised, collective efforts to challenge dominant narratives and practices – aligns closely with core definitions of social movements. This convergence is particularly evident in the growing number of disputes related to heritage, in which activist groups play a significant role. No longer solely the domain of experts and institutions, the conservation of cultural heritage has become a contested terrain, with activism serving as a driving force behind its transformation. This literature review examines the multifaceted political agency of conservation activists, tracing their trajectory from the margins to the centre of heritage discourse. By analysing key theoretical frameworks and drawing upon relevant case studies, this review aims to illuminate the complex interplay between activism, power, and the future of heritage. It specifically focuses on how social movement theories provide a critical lens for understanding these dynamics. This analysis will not only highlight the significance of activism in shaping heritage conservation but also contribute to a deeper understanding of social movements themselves within the specific context of cultural heritage struggles. The exploration of this intersection will enable a more nuanced comprehension of the transformative potential of activism in the heritage sector, ultimately enhancing our appreciation of the role of collective action in shaping cultural narratives and influencing conservation practices.

The seeds of contemporary conservation activism can be traced back to early critiques of established heritage practices. David Lowenthal's influential work, *The Past Is a Foreign Country* (1985), while not explicitly focused on activism, provided fertile ground for its emergence. Lowenthal's critique of the inherent biases within traditional preservation practices, which often privileged elite perspectives and textual sources over lived experiences, illuminated a crucial gap in heritage discourse. This gap created space for activist voices advocating for a more inclusive and representative approach to understanding and managing the past. Furthermore, Lowenthal's observation – that preservation often serves as a reactive response to broader societal anxieties – foreshadowed the proactive and transformative potential of activism. He argues that written texts are not representative, as they have historically been heavily weighted toward literate elites who took the trouble to record their views. He considers heritage preservation as a limited engagement with the past, stemming from our inability to understand and engage with it, which, in turn, perpetuates this inability.⁷ In this framework, heritage organisations are portrayed not as engaged drivers of our understanding of heritage and history but rather as reactive respondents to broader social changes, including feelings of loss, the role of landmarks, and the intertwining of personal and public histories.

Lowenthal's insights highlight the necessity for a shift towards a more dynamic and participatory heritage practice – one that recognises and values diverse narratives and experiences. This foundation has inspired contemporary activists to challenge existing practices and advocate for the inclusion and representation of marginalised voices within heritage discourse. As a result, they are transforming the way we conceive of and engage with cultural heritage, moving beyond traditional views to embrace a more holistic understanding that encompasses a wide array of perspectives. This transformation not only enriches the narrative surrounding heritage but also fosters deeper connections between individuals and their cultural histories, empowering communities to assert their identities within broader societal contexts. By advocating for inclusivity and engagement, these activists play a crucial role in redefining the practices and meanings associated with cultural heritage in today's complex world.

Patrick Wright's *On Living in an Old Country* (1985) and Robert Hewison's *The Heritage Industry*

(1987) offered more pointed critiques of the political instrumentalisation of heritage.⁸ Building upon Lowenthal's critique of institutional bias, these authors explicitly linked heritage to broader power structures. They argued that national heritage, particularly in the British context, was frequently deployed to reinforce conservative ideologies and maintain existing social hierarchies. By exposing these inherent power dynamics, Wright and Hewison provided a crucial impetus for the rise of activist movements seeking to challenge dominant narratives and reclaim heritage as a site of contestation.

Shifting the focus from critiques of institutional practices to the agency of individuals and communities, Raphael Samuel's *Theatres of Memory* (1994) offered a powerful counter-narrative to traditional depictions of heritage enthusiasts as passive consumers of official history.⁹ Samuel's work celebrated the active role of individuals in shaping historical narratives and engaging in collective acts of remembrance. His evocative metaphor of heritage as the work of a thousand hands underscored the democratic potential of heritage practices, and therefore requires an approach that addresses the ensemble of activities and practices in which ideas of history are embedded or a dialectic of past–present relations is rehearsed. This emphasis on collective participation laid the groundwork for understanding the legitimacy and power of activist interventions.

Laurajane Smith's groundbreaking *The Uses of Heritage* (2006) further solidified the theoretical foundation for understanding the political dimensions of conservation activism.¹⁰ Extending Samuel's focus on participatory heritage practices, Smith introduced the critical concept of the Authorized Heritage Discourse (AHD). She also argued that the AHD, with its emphasis on expert knowledge, top-down management, and universalising narratives, systematically marginalised the perspectives and experiences of local communities. By challenging AHDs, activists sought to decolonise heritage practices, empower marginalised voices, and promote more equitable and inclusive forms of heritage management.

Rodney Harrison's (2013) application of actor–network theory (ANT) provides a valuable framework for understanding the complexities of contemporary heritage activism.¹¹ Harrison's exploration of heritage within contemporary debates about structure and agency moves beyond bipolar models, such as dominant–subaltern and local–global. This per-

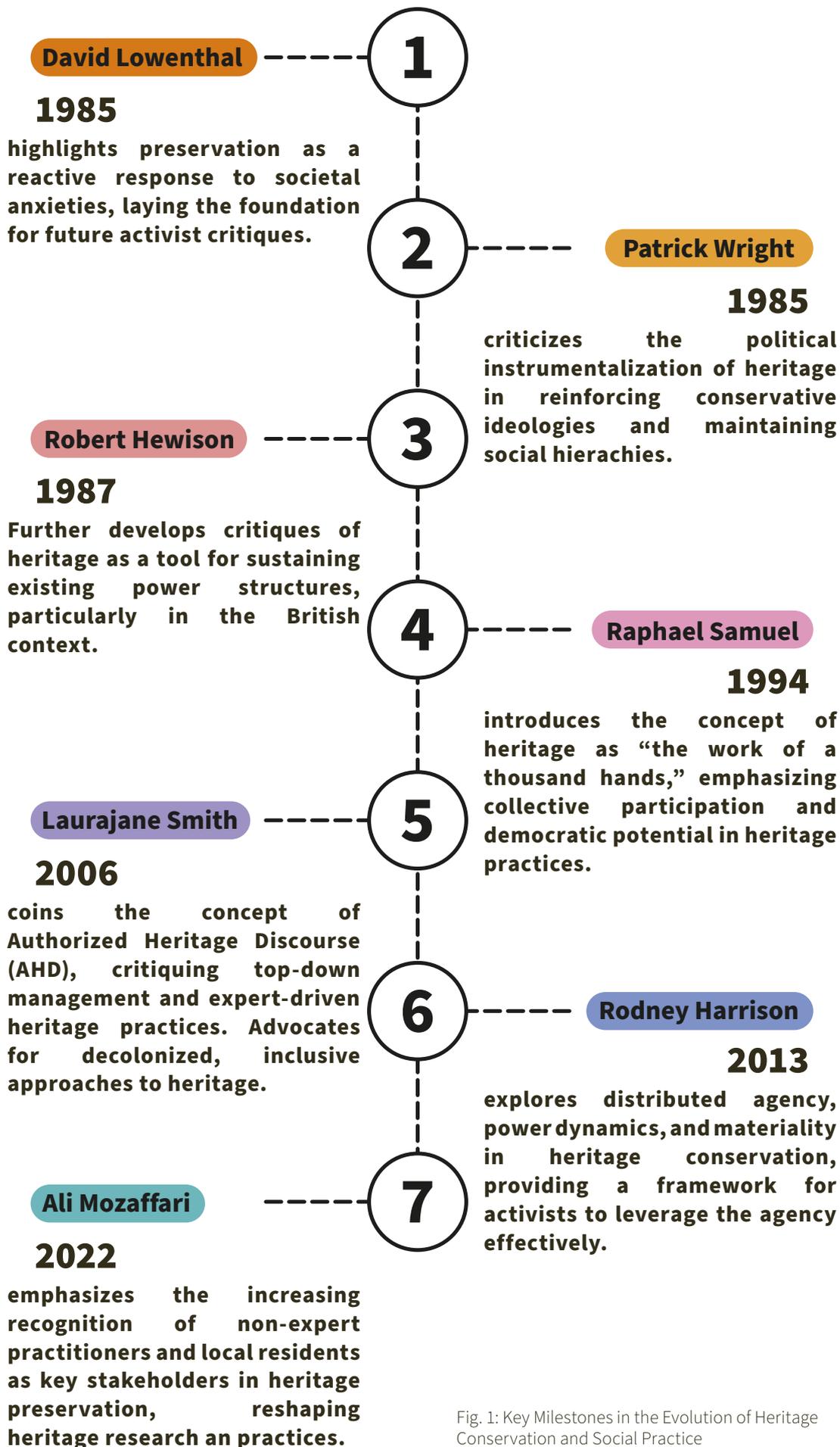


Fig. 1: Key Milestones in the Evolution of Heritage Conservation and Social Practice

spective highlights the distributed nature of agency and the intricate relationships between power, knowledge, and materiality in heritage conservation. By understanding these complex networks, activists can more effectively leverage their agency to achieve desired outcomes.

Continuing the trajectory of challenging established power structures within the heritage field, contemporary scholarship highlights the increasingly central role of social movements in shaping heritage discourse and practice. The work of Mozaffari et al. (2022) emphasises the growing recognition of non-expert practitioners and local residents as essential stakeholders in heritage preservation.¹² They argue that social movements have always been important to the generation of heritage and are now increasingly central to how researchers define heritage, due to the recognition of the importance of residents and other non-expert practitioners to its creation and upkeep.

The emergence of heritage activism and NGOs in Iran, though a gradual and intricate process, can be symbolically linked to the controversy surrounding the construction of the Sivand Dam in 2008. Located near the World Heritage Site of Pasargadae, the dam's construction sparked widespread outrage among academics, professionals, and heritage enthusiasts, beginning as early as 2004 with initial reports documenting violations. The ensuing controversy rapidly escalated into public protests due to perceptions of governmental mismanagement and lack of transparency. These protests coalesced around a shared narrative that emphasised the importance of safeguarding pre-Islamic heritage as an integral component of Iranian national identity. This episode underscored the potent social and political significance of pre-Islamic heritage in modern Iran. The government's response, which framed dissent as a threat to national security, further galvanised heritage activists, who organised demonstrations across multiple cities. This marked a significant turning point in the open engagement between civil society and the state regarding heritage issues. The Sivand Dam controversy became a catalyst, bringing heritage activism into the public sphere and demonstrating its capacity to challenge official narratives and mobilise public opinion.

This shift reflects a broader democratisation of the field – driven in part by the rise of social media, which has amplified the voices of activists and facilitated new forms of organisation and advocacy. However, this democratisation also presents new

challenges, as activists must navigate increasingly complex political landscapes and negotiate with a wider range of stakeholders. Conservation activism has fundamentally transformed the field of heritage studies, challenging traditional power structures, advocating for inclusive practices, and pushing the boundaries of what constitutes heritage. From early critiques of institutional bias to contemporary movements challenging globalisation and climate change, activists have played a crucial role in shaping the discourse and practice of heritage conservation. As heritage continues to be a site of contestation and negotiation, the political agency of conservation activists will remain essential in ensuring a more just, equitable, and sustainable future for cultural heritage worldwide. The ongoing dialogue between activists, institutions, and communities will ultimately determine the future trajectory of heritage, underscoring the need for continued research, critical engagement, and collaborative action.

Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative research design, employing narrative inquiry as the primary methodology to explore the experiences and strategies of cultural heritage activists in Iran. Narrative inquiry was chosen for its ability to illuminate human experiences through stories, which serve as powerful tools for understanding actions, values, and the broader social and institutional contexts in which they unfold. As Forester highlights, stories fulfil multiple functions, including descriptive, moral, political, and deliberative roles, offering deep insights into what truly matters in specific contexts.¹³ Building on this perspective, Throgmorton emphasises the importance of the networks, settings, and processes that shape storytelling,¹⁴ while Van Hulst notes that stories can articulate both what is and what ought to be.¹⁵ Together, these perspectives underscore the relevance of narrative inquiry for examining the intricate dynamics of heritage activism and its broader implications.

Participants were selected using an information-oriented approach as outlined by Flyvbjerg, focusing on maximising information richness from a small, purposefully chosen sample.¹⁶ The study engaged four activists who played pivotal roles in halting significant projects that threatened Iran's cultural heritage. These participants were chosen due to their notable success in preventing the destruction of heritage sites, offering unique and impactful narratives of effective activism. The selected

cases represent tangible instances where activist efforts resulted in meaningful outcomes, making them particularly suitable for understanding the dynamics of heritage activism in complex socio-political contexts.

Data were collected through in-depth, semi-structured interviews conducted over an extended period, from 6 May to 30 June 2024. This prolonged engagement allowed the research team to establish trust with participants, fostering an open and collaborative environment for dialogue. The interviews were designed as extended conversations, often requiring multiple sessions to enable a comprehensive exploration of the activists' experiences, strategies, and challenges. This iterative process encouraged the co-construction of meaning, with both researchers and participants actively contributing to deepening the understanding of heritage activism.

The interviews were analysed using MAXQDA software, which facilitated systematic coding and thematic analysis of the narratives. The use of MAXQDA allowed the research team to identify patterns, themes, and insights across the data, ensuring a rigorous and transparent analytical process. This approach provided a structured framework to delve into the activists' strategies, motivations, and the broader implications of their work on cultural heritage conservation in Iran.

This methodology, which integrates narrative inquiry, purposeful participant selection, and advanced analytical tools, enabled the study to provide a nuanced and rich understanding of heritage activism. By deeply engaging with the activists' stories and employing systematic analysis, the research highlights the complexities and transformative potential of their work within the broader context of cultural heritage preservation.

Results and Discussion

Interviews with activists in Iran reveal that, while each employs specific tools depending on their area of focus, they share common strategic resources that empower them within the Iranian context. Although these resources may not be universally applicable to all fields or even to all projects within a specific field, they have yielded undeniable results in recent years within Iran's conservation movement. Activists in Iran have developed and refined a multifaceted and successful approach to advocating for cultural and natural heritage. Their activities span a broad spectrum of heritage sites – from individual

historic houses as examples of architectural heritage, to entire historic urban fabrics, and even ancient cemeteries intertwined with natural heritage. For example, they have been involved in campaigns to prevent the destruction of the historic Agha Najafi Street in Isfahan, the historic fabric of Shiraz, the historic Sabet Pasal House in Tehran, and the ancient LahSavareh cemetery in Dena. Their activities are characterised by the seamless integration of various resources in relation to their objectives. These efforts are sustained by an unwavering commitment to continuity. Each of these elements plays a crucial role in their conservational strategy, amplifying their impact and inspiring broader movements.

Media has been a cornerstone of these activists' endeavours, serving as a powerful tool for raising awareness and mobilising action. One activist recalls the significant role of visual evidence in his experience in stopping the illegal excavation of an ancient mound: "I took pictures of the destruction and sent them to several news agencies. I received numerous calls, and a media wave was created that stopped the illegal excavation."¹⁷ Indeed, this documentation served as irrefutable evidence, drawing public attention to the violations. Another activist explained how media campaigns often evolve into broader movements, recounting his experiences in stopping the destruction of historic gardens and houses in Tehran: "Whenever a historical site or garden was threatened, we would launch a media campaign. If that didn't work, we would escalate by mobilising locals, organising protests in front of the city council, and inviting the media to cover it."¹⁸

Furthermore, social media platforms such as Telegram, WhatsApp, and Instagram have amplified their reach, providing avenues for the rapid and widespread dissemination of information. One activist elaborated: "I set up WhatsApp and Telegram groups, created an Instagram page, and started a campaign. Within days, the issue gained traction across multiple platforms."¹⁹ Another activist, with years of experience in preserving historical sites and ancient mounds in Khuzestan, noted: "We were among the first organisations to launch a heritage news website, and we were very successful in disseminating our news."²⁰ These efforts enable activists to galvanise public attention and generate momentum in support of their objectives.

Documentation forms the backbone of these activists' advocacy efforts, providing the necessary evidence to substantiate their claims and engage with

the public and authorities. Activists meticulously gather and organise various records, including photographs, videos, and official documents. One activist described their experience in trying to stop the destruction of an ancient cemetery: “We compiled violations of a major dam project that would submerge a heritage site, and this was the beginning of obtaining a series of documents. Once the information was gathered, a package was created against the dam construction. This same information became the starting point for documenting the violations that we collected and published.”²¹ Another activist emphasised how documentation can transform isolated incidents into significant public concerns: “Our documentation of the walls of Hormuz Ardeshir, along with news reports, turned this issue into a major public concern.”²² This level of detail not only validates activists’ positions but also equips them with credible resources for media campaigns and legal action, making their arguments more persuasive and difficult to dismiss.

The legal system serves as another powerful avenue for these activists, who leverage legal mechanisms to hold violators accountable and enforce the protection of cultural and environmental assets. Through formal complaints, lawsuits, and procedural challenges, they compel authorities to address their concerns. One activist explained their approach: “We submitted requests to the government structure in writing, through complaints and formal notices, and this correspondence allowed us to obtain a substantial amount of documentation.”²³ They further elaborated on the outcomes of their legal interventions: “By filing formal objections to unlawful decisions, we exposed major flaws in the permitting process and compelled authorities to undertake a comprehensive review of environmental and heritage impact assessments for projects.”²⁴ These legal strategies can not only delay or halt destructive projects but also establish important precedents and open pathways for systemic change and reform. The activists strategically utilise the legal system to challenge harmful projects, forcing transparency and accountability from governmental bodies. Their actions create a body of evidence that can be used in future cases, contributing to long-term legal and societal change.

Direct engagement with opponents, including policymakers, developers, and officials, constitutes another vital component of their strategy. Engaging with these stakeholders allows activists to challenge

counter-arguments and negotiate for better outcomes. One activist commented on this aspect of their work: “After one of these official meetings, I wrote a letter to the Minister of Cultural Heritage, stating that interventions in the historical context of Isfahan are being conducted based not on the preservation of that context but on a detailed plan, and the members of the technical council are not heritage defenders but rather the infantry of the municipality.”²⁵ Another activist highlighted the value of understanding opponents’ motivations: “Attending these official meetings allowed me to gain a better understanding of the challenges and problems of registering national monuments. With this understanding, we subsequently held courses for journalists and activists in Khuzestan province. Moreover, a relationship was formed that made the officials accountable to us as well.”²⁶ These interactions, while often contentious, provide opportunities to influence decisions and ensure that preservation concerns are considered. By directly confronting those who threaten cultural heritage, activists can expose flawed arguments, exert pressure, and foster a more informed dialogue that can lead to positive change. This direct engagement demonstrates a commitment to finding solutions through communication and negotiation, even with those who hold opposing views.

Another crucial aspect is the activists’ engagement with the public. Building popular support is paramount for their movements to be sustainable and to effect meaningful change. Activists conduct workshops, launch local campaigns, and employ accessible language to ensure constructive engagement with the local community. One activist described their efforts: “I receive many reports from people. I read these reports, meet with each individual, and talk to them. In fact, I co-write the scenario for disseminating news in the media with the people.”²⁷ Another activist emphasised the importance of this interaction: “In the past two years, we have travelled to various places. Our continuous follow-ups have led to the creation of businesses in some villages in the tourism sector, but at the same time, people are also taking care of their cultural heritage. They keep us informed about the state of their city’s heritage.”²⁸ By fostering these relationships, activists transform scattered protests into cohesive, community-based initiatives that carry greater weight in advocacy efforts. All these strategies are underpinned by a deep emotional

Resources	Description/Usage
Media	Exclusive media; Communication with other media
Legal levers	Lawsuits; Administrative correspondence; Registration in the list of national monuments
Documents	Data collection; Analysing information to understand situations and sometimes presenting alternatives
Interaction with antagonists	Coalitions; Raising the cost (financial, legal, political, reputational, etc.) of illegal activities by agents
Interaction with people	Social mobilisation; Cooperation with NGOs or active individuals; Achieving strategic planning through dialogue
Emotions and beliefs	Childhood and family influences; Understanding the emotions and personalities of antagonists and supporters, to determine how to influence them
Continuity	Constant efforts to prevent destruction in critical situations; Preventative strategies; Resistance to threats and challenges

Table 1: Strategic resources of Iranian activists

connection to their work. Activists are driven by a shared belief in the importance of cultural heritage preservation and environmental protection. One activist explained: “It’s all because of the love for this land and the commitment that we have no right to remain silent in the face of the destruction of this land’s heritage.”²⁹ Another activist added: “I believe that everyone, in every position, should do something for their country as much as they can. Do something for the people, without any expectations.”³⁰ This emotional foundation not only sustains their efforts but also inspires others to join their cause, creating a ripple effect that amplifies their movements. The activists understand that public support is essential for long-term success. By connecting with people on an emotional level, sharing their passion for preservation, and empowering communities to take ownership of their heritage, they create a powerful force for change.

Continuity is a hallmark of their activism. The activists maintain sustained efforts over the course of years, adapting their strategies to meet evolving circumstances and challenges. Activist 1 repeatedly emphasises that “this path continues, and we will stand firm until the last moment.”³¹ Activist 2 be-

lieves that “one must strive for the country. I should not abandon the path I have learned after all these years.”³² Activist 3 defines activism as “the prominence of an individual or association through continuous activity.”³³ Activist 4 underscores the importance of perseverance: “If we want to back down, this whole past will be questioned. There are some achievements that society may not see because they are very small. In a space where nothing can be done, I am working; that itself is an achievement. It’s an art to be able to adapt yourself to a situation and stay.”³⁴ This steadfast commitment to their cause, in the face of setbacks and obstacles, demonstrates profound dedication. Their persistence emphasises a long-term vision, recognising that protecting cultural heritage and the environment is an ongoing struggle requiring sustained effort and adaptability. They view their work not as isolated events but as a continuous process of engagement, adaptation, and resistance. This enduring commitment is crucial for achieving lasting change and ensuring the preservation of cultural and environmental treasures for future generations. They understand that setbacks are inevitable but refuse to be discouraged, drawing strength and motivation from their unwavering be-

lief in the importance of their mission. Their ability to adapt to changing circumstances while maintaining their core values allows them to remain effective advocates for preservation in a complex and dynamic environment.

As demonstrated in Table 1, activists in Iran have established a comprehensive and impactful advocacy framework by employing innovative uses of media, meticulous documentation, strategic legal levers, effective interaction with antagonists and local communities, and an unwavering emotional commitment. Their efforts not only contribute to the protection of cultural heritage and environmental resources but also inspire broader movements worldwide, showcasing the power of grassroots activism in driving meaningful and systemic change.

The success of these activists lies in their ability to integrate diverse strategies and tools into a holistic approach that addresses immediate threats while fostering long-term resilience and transformation. Their work demonstrates that grassroots activism, when combined with creativity, determination, and inclusivity, can effectively challenge established power systems. By bridging the gap between the local and the global, as well as the personal and the political, they not only champion their causes but also define new possibilities for collective action in an increasingly interconnected world. Their innovative use of media amplifies their message and reaches a wider audience, while meticulous documentation provides crucial evidence that supports legal challenges and advocacy efforts. Strategic legal action holds powerful entities accountable, and effective engagement with both opponents and local communities builds broader support and fosters collaborative solutions. Underpinning all of this is an unwavering emotional commitment – a deep passion that fuels their tireless efforts and inspires others to join their cause.

This comprehensive approach allows them to tackle complex challenges on multiple fronts, creating a synergistic effect that magnifies their impact. They understand that lasting change requires more than isolated actions; it necessitates a multifaceted strategy that addresses the root causes of the problems they seek to solve. By working at both the local and global levels, they create a powerful network of support and influence, ensuring that their voices are heard and their concerns are addressed. In essence, these activists are not just preserving the past; they

are shaping the future, by demonstrating the transformative potential of collective action and inspiring others to join the fight for a more just and sustainable world.

Conclusion

This study has delved into the dynamic landscape of heritage activism in Iran, revealing the intricate strategies and unwavering dedication of individuals working to protect cultural and environmental treasures. Through a qualitative lens and employing narrative-based tools, the research has illuminated the lived experiences of these activists, highlighting their resourceful approaches and significant contributions to a more democratic discourse on heritage conservation. The findings underscore that Iranian heritage activists operate within a complex socio-political context, often challenging decisions made behind closed doors with limited public engagement. By strategically employing media, meticulous documentation, legal action, and engagement with opponents and local communities – fuelled by an unwavering emotional commitment – these activists have carved out a potent and effective advocacy framework. Their actions not only safeguard heritage but also serve as a powerful testament to the transformative potential of grassroots activism in driving systemic change and fostering democratic principles within this specialised field. The research demonstrates that these activists are not merely reacting to threats; rather, they are proactively shaping the future of heritage conservation in Iran. Their holistic approach, integrating diverse strategies and tools, allows them to address immediate challenges while simultaneously advocating for long-term resilience and systemic reform. Their persistent efforts, driven by a deep passion for their cause, inspire broader movements and contribute significantly to a global understanding of the power of collective action. By bridging local concerns with global implications, these activists redefine the possibilities of collective action in an increasingly interconnected world, leaving a lasting legacy through the preservation of cultural heritage for future generations. Further research could explore the long-term impacts of these activist movements on policy changes and institutional practices within Iran's heritage sector, as well as the broader implications for participatory democracy in the country.

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- 1 Key Milestones in the Evolution of Heritage Conservation and Social Practice

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Heritage Processes Between Democracy and Autocracy

Two Decisions on Hagia Sophia 86 Years Apart

BARIŞ ALTAN

ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

Die Umwandlung der großen Moschee Hagia Sophia in Istanbul in ein Museum im Jahr 1934 durch Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, den Gründer und ersten Präsidenten der Türkischen Republik, ist auch heute noch bedeutend für den Bruch der Assoziation mit der osmanischen Vergangenheit des Denkmals zugunsten einer neu geschaffenen Repräsentation der Republik. Rechtskonservative Kreise in der türkischen Gesellschaft betrachten diese Entscheidung jedoch als autokratisch und als Verstoß gegen den Willen und das Vermächtnis von Sultan Mehmed II., der Istanbul 1453 eroberte und das Gebäude von einer Kirche in eine Moschee umwandelte. Im Juli 2020 erklärte Recep Tayyip Erdoğan per Präsidialdekret die Umwidmung der Hagia Sophia zu einer Moschee. Diese Initiative wurde als Ausdruck seiner kompromisslosen Haltung gegenüber dem byzantinischen Erbe der Türkei gesehen. Ähnlich wie Atatürks Entscheidung von 1934 wurde auch Erdogans Vorgehen heftig kritisiert, weil es autokratisch und von einem revanchistischen Impuls getrieben war und seine politischen Ambitionen in den Vordergrund stellte.

Zwischen diesen beiden Entscheidungen liegen 86 Jahre, in denen die Türkei radikale politische und gesellschaftliche Veränderungen erlebte. Daher ist es wichtig, die Zeiträume, in denen diese Maßnahmen ergriffen wurden, zu kontextualisieren und die Ähnlichkeiten, Unterschiede und Beweggründe aus politischer, sozialer und denkmalpflegerischer Sicht zu vergleichen. Die Hagia Sophia, eines der bekanntesten und kulturell bedeutendsten Denkmäler der Türkei, stand immer wieder im Mittelpunkt der Diskussion über die Instrumentalisierung des kulturellen Erbes. In diesem Artikel werden die beiden Entscheidungen der Präsidenten unter den Gesichtspunkten der Instrumentalisierung des Kulturerbes und der Demokratisierung sowie der Wahrnehmungen der beiden Staatsoberhäupter in Bezug auf ihre Entscheidungen zur Hagia Sophia untersucht.

ABSTRACT

The conversion of the Hagia Sophia Grand Mosque in Istanbul into a museum in 1934 by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, the founder and first president of the Republic of Turkey, remains a significant initiative aimed at severing the association of the monument's Ottoman past from the newly established narrative of the Republic. However, conservative right-wing factions within Turkish society view this decision as autocratic and contrary to the will and legacy of Sultan Mehmed II, who conquered Istanbul in 1453 and transformed the building from a church into a mosque. In July 2020, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, the current president of Turkey, redesignated Hagia Sophia as a mosque by means of presidential decree. This initiative was seen as a reflection of his uncompromising attitude towards Turkey's Byzantine heritage (particularly concerning Hagia Sophia), which finds its roots back in the 1950s and in Erdoğan's own political career. Similar to Atatürk's 1934 decision, Erdoğan's action faced significant criticism for being autocratic, driven by a revanchist impulse, and prioritising his political ambitions.

These two decisions were separated by 86 years, during which Turkey experienced radical political and societal changes. Thus, it is essential to contextualise the periods in which these actions were taken and to compare the similarities, differences, and motivations behind them from political, social, and heritage management perspectives. Hagia Sophia, one of Turkey's most recognised and culturally significant monuments, has consistently been a focal point of discussion regarding the instrumentalisation of cultural heritage. This article will also examine both presidential decisions through the lenses of heritage instrumentalisation and democratisation, as well as the perceptions of these two leaders in relation to their choices regarding Hagia Sophia.

Introduction

The current Hagia Sophia was completed in 537 during the reign of Justinian I, following the destruction of its two predecessors as a result of two revolts in 404 and 532 CE.¹ Within this 1,500-year history, it has witnessed numerous significant historical events. These events impacted both the architecture and structure of the monument as well as its function.

Hagia Sophia was built as an Orthodox church and continued this function until 1453, with a short interruption in the 13th century. Constantinople witnessed the Latin Occupation from 1204 to 1261, during which the monument served as a Catholic cathedral. The next transformation of Hagia Sophia occurred in May 1453, with the Ottoman conquest of Constantinople. Shortly thereafter, the building was converted into a mosque. The endowment (waqf) established by Mehmed II provided resources for maintaining and repairing the monument throughout the centuries of Ottoman rule. In the 16th century, the exterior walls were reinforced with buttresses. The building underwent various repairs during the 17th and 18th centuries, with a comprehensive restoration carried out between 1847 and 1858.²

The establishment of the Republic of Turkey on 29 October 1923, had significant effects on cultural heritage in general and Hagia Sophia in particular. Some of the institutions responsible for the maintenance and repair of historical buildings during the Ottoman period were reformed and continued their functions, ensuring continuity in the preservation of historical structures.³ This contributed to the continuation of conservation efforts for Hagia Sophia, which underwent protection and repair work until, after functioning as a mosque for 481 years, it was converted into a museum in November 1934 by decree of Atatürk.⁴ Conservation efforts continued in the following decades, along with political discussions related to its function, which intensified after 2010. This culminated in another presidential decree on 10 July 2020 – this time issued by Erdoğan – who took the controversial decision to redesignate Hagia Sophia as a mosque.⁵

Hagia Sophia, inscribed on the World Heritage List in 1985 as part of Sultanahmet Archaeological Park, has a multi-layered and value-laden past. Its courageous and innovative architecture inspired many monuments throughout history, particularly the mosques built during the classical period of Ottoman architecture. It was referred to as the Great

Church in the Middle Ages and became the symbolic mosque of the Islamic World after the conquest of Constantinople. Its desacralisation and museification added another layer to its past and triggered long-lasting discussions in the conservative circles of Turkish society.

The Contexts of 1934 and 2020

This article examines the decisions made in 1934 and 2020 that led to a functional change in Hagia Sophia, analysing these events comparatively across contexts of political regime, society, international relations, and cultural heritage management. The evaluation focuses specifically on the fundamental frameworks of these contexts in their respective years.

After its establishment in 1923, Turkey adopted a parliamentary democracy, although it functioned under a single-party regime. Atatürk held office until his death in 1938, during which three prime ministers served. An attempt to transition to a multi-party system was made in 1930, but the opposition party created at that time functioned for only three months. Efforts to establish a multi-party system emerged again in 1945, but were only fully realised in 1950.⁶

Between 1950 and 2016, Turkey experienced four military coups, one of which was unsuccessful. The 1980 coup led to the dissolution of political parties and the imprisonment of their leaders. Civilian governance resumed with elections in 1983, and Turkey was governed by coalition governments until the *Justice and Development Party* (JDP) took sole control in 2002.⁷ Following a failed coup-attempt in 2016, the aftermath saw a transition from a parliamentary to a presidential system in 2017, abolishing the office of the prime minister, incapacitating the cabinet, and granting the president the authority to govern by decree.

According to the first census conducted after the establishment of the Republic, Turkey had a population of 13.5 million, of which 24% resided in urban areas. By 1934, the population had exceeded 16 million, although the urbanisation rate declined to 23%.⁸ In 1923, only 3% of the total population was enrolled in educational institutions, and the literacy rate was a mere 6%.⁹ However, after the 1928 *Alphabet Reform* and subsequent literacy campaigns, the literacy rate increased to 18% by 1934.¹⁰ The 1933 *University Reform* transformed *Istanbul Darülfünun*, an institution established during the

Ottoman Empire, into the modern *Istanbul University* – the country’s only university at that time.¹¹

As of 2020, Turkey’s population had reached 83 million, with 93% living in urban areas,¹² and the literacy rate had risen to 96%.¹³ The country was home to 129 public and 74 private universities.¹⁴ Since the JDP came to power in 2002, there have been nine changes in the position of Minister of National Education, six changes to the secondary school entrance system, and three changes to the university entrance system¹⁵ – all aimed at fostering a more religious and conservative society. Religious vocational schools made up 13% of all secondary schools,¹⁶ and the *The Century of Türkiye Educational Model* introduced in April 2024 significantly increased the emphasis on religious education in the curriculum.¹⁷

The global impact of the 1929 Great Depression affected Turkey, but the country pursued a distinct foreign policy through multilateral and bilateral diplomatic initiatives.¹⁸ Due to limited economic resources and a shortage of skilled professionals, Turkey was not a dominant player in international affairs. However, as the successor state to the Ottoman Empire, and considering its geopolitical location, Turkey maintained some influence in Middle Eastern politics.¹⁹

After World War II, Turkey took significant steps on the international stage, becoming a founding member of the *United Nations* in 1945 and joining NATO in 1952.²⁰ The close ties established with the United States through the Marshall Plan (1948–1949) laid the foundation for long-term strategic partnerships. Although Turkey began accession negotiations with the *European Union* in 2005, the process has effectively stalled over the past decade. In academic discourse, the evolution of Turkey’s foreign policy in recent years is often described in terms such as „axis shift“ and „distancing from the West.“²¹

After the foundation of the Republic, some institutions inherited from the Ottoman era continued to operate, but the resources available for cultural heritage management remained limited. In 1931, during Atatürk’s visit to Konya, directives were issued to enhance conservation efforts for cultural heritage. The establishment of the *Monuments Protection Commission* in 1933 marked a significant step toward a nationwide approach to heritage preservation.²² Despite these advancements, by 1934, Turkey had very few experts in cultural heritage management. In 1929, the budget for the *Istanbul Archaeological Museums*, which oversaw cultural assets under the

Ministry of National Education, funded only one specialist position each for the Byzantine, Roman, and Greek sections.²³

Turkey’s active participation in international cultural heritage policies began with its founding membership of *UNESCO* in 1945. A significant milestone occurred in 1966 in higher education with the establishment of a heritage conservation program at the *Middle East Technical University*, followed by similar programs at *Istanbul Technical University* and *Yıldız Technical University* in the 1970s.²⁴ *ICOMOS’ Turkish National Committee* was founded in 1974 by a bylaw, and the enactment of the *Law on the Protection of Cultural and Natural Assets* in 1983 created a more structured framework for heritage conservation. Turkey’s relationship with *UNESCO* was further strengthened in 1985 when its first cultural site was inscribed on the *World Heritage List*. Since then, Turkey has served on the *UNESCO World Heritage Committee* for three terms: 1983–1989, 2013–2017, and 2023–2027.²⁵

Two Contexts, Two Decisions: Similarities, Differences, and Motivations

The decisions in 1934 and 2020, despite being made in different contexts, share a fundamental similarity: they utilise the country’s most significant, symbolic, and value-laden monument for political purposes. Additionally, both decisions were made during periods of societal transformation. The 1934 decision came shortly after the radical transition from an empire to a republic, amidst intense social change. Similarly, leading up to 2020, the JDP increasingly revealed its societal agenda, particularly through education reforms that had been developing since the 2010s and intensified after the 2013 Gezi Protests.²⁶

Indoctrination through a new historical narrative and education system was another similarity that can be observed in both decisions. The *Turkish History Thesis* (THT), announced at the *First Turkish History Congress* in 1932 by the *Turkish Historical Society* (established by Atatürk in 1931 to conduct scientific research on Turkish history), aimed to create a new society through a novel educational doctrine. As an ethno-historical theory, THT encouraged Turkish society, under the guidance of the ruling cadre, to seek its roots in the Sumerians and Hittites, while bypassing the pre-Turkish and Christian history of Anatolia.²⁷ Despite various objections, the role of Ottoman history in THT had also diminished considerably.²⁸

The emphasis on religious values in education increased after 2010 as a result of modifications to the high school and university entrance systems, and particularly the reopening of lower grades of Imam Hatip schools (vocational schools to train government-employed religious personnel) in 2012. This shift was reflected in political discourse, especially in the rhetoric of Erdoğan. In February 2012, during a provincial chairmen's meeting of his party, Erdoğan stated, „They accuse me of dividing the country over religion, but I stand by my words. I said, ‚Our goal is to raise a devout generation.‘ I stand by these words.“²⁹

The JDP added a new layer to this indoctrination; a new cultural policy narrative. In 2018, the Director of Communications for the Presidency, Fahrettin Altun, shared on social media a photograph of a bookstore display on one of Istanbul's major pedestrian streets, writing, „Enough is enough! Has the time not come for a local and national cultural policy?“³⁰

The contrast between these two decisions reveals substantial distinctions between Atatürk's and Erdoğan's rhetoric and decision-making processes. Atatürk emphasised concepts such as „positive sciences,“ „commitment to science,“ „fine arts,“ and „advanced civilisation“ in his speech delivered for the tenth anniversary of the Republic, a year before the 1934 decision.³¹ Similar themes were echoed in the decision to convert Hagia Sophia into a museum. On the other hand, the JDP has increasingly adopted a Neo-Ottomanist discourse since 2009, using terms such as „ancestry,“ „civilisation,“ „conquest,“ „resurrection,“ „raising again,“ „restoration,“ and „New Turkey,“ particularly in discussions involving Hagia Sophia.³²

The idea of converting Hagia Sophia into a museum can be traced back to 1931, when Thomas Whittemore, the director of the *Byzantine Institute of America*, initiated restoration work to uncover and preserve its mosaics (Fig. 1).³³ Subsequently, a commission was established in August 1934, chaired by Aziz Ogan, the then director of Istanbul Museums. This commission, composed of museum directors, experts, municipal and state representatives, and architects, prepared a report submitted to the *Ministry of National Education*.³⁴ Shortly thereafter, on 24 November 1934, a decree signed by members of the *Council of Ministers* and Atatürk officially converted Hagia Sophia into a museum.



Fig. 1: Scaffold in the narthex, The Mosaics of St. Sophia in Istanbul, Preliminary Report on the First Year's Work, 1931–1932, by Thomas Whittemore, Plate I.

Since hosting Habitat II (the Second United Nations Conference on Human Settlements) in Istanbul in 1996, Turkey has a rapidly growing, vibrant, and well-connected civil society that is struggling to manage and protect cultural heritage. In such a setting, the process that led to the reconversion of Hagia Sophia into a mosque in 2020 lacked involvement of experts, relevant institutions, and civil society organisations, which are key components of contemporary approaches to managing cultural heritage. Additionally, the process was accompanied

by two other developments: conversion of two other Hagia Sophias outside Istanbul, and a legal process concerning Istanbul's Hagia Sophia. The Hagia Sophia in Iznik, which had functioned as a museum since 1940, was converted into a mosque in 2011 after administrative and legal procedures that dated back to 1983. Similarly, the Hagia Sophia in Trabzon, which had served as a museum since 1964, became a mosque in 2013.³⁵ Thus, it is reasonable to argue that these precedents paved the way for the similar fate of the Hagia Sophia in Istanbul.

While political debates surrounding the 1934 decision had been ongoing since the 1950s, a legal struggle for Istanbul's Hagia Sophia involving various lawsuits emerged after 2010. This culminated in a ruling by the *Council of State* on 10 July 2020, which removed all legal barriers to converting Hagia Sophia back into a mosque.³⁶

Actually, Erdoğan resisted pressure from his electoral base to convert Hagia Sophia into a mosque during the second decade of his rule. At a rally on 16 March 2019, when supporters urged him to carry out the conversion, he pointed to a mosque located about 500 meters away from Hagia Sophia, responding, „First, fill up Sultanahmet Mosque, we won't fall for provocations.“³⁷ However, 15 months later, he changed his mind. Public opinion research indicated that his main motivation for this shift was to divert attention from the country's worsening economic conditions.³⁸ The presidential decree issued by Erdoğan provided no justification for this conversion, only noting the annulment of the 1934 decision and the transfer of Hagia Sophia to the *Directorate of Religious Affairs* (Fig. 2).³⁹

The motivations behind the 1934 decision can be inferred from the decree itself. The text explicitly states that the primary rationale for converting the mosque into a museum was its historical significance, asserting that „...the museum would bring joy to the Oriental world and provide humanity with a new institution of science.“ Furthermore, the decree addressed logistical aspects such as how restoration and maintenance costs would be covered, which institutions would be responsible for these efforts, and how surrounding urban development would be managed.⁴⁰ In this regard, the decree can be seen as an early attempt to establish a management plan for the monument.

Who Is a Democrat, and Who Is an Autocrat?

According to public opinion research conducted in October 2010, 69% of Turkish society believes that Atatürk's ideals are still valid today; Additionally, 75% feel that Atatürk was a democratic statesman.⁴¹ Although those percentages may have changed since 2010, it remains accurate (despite criticisms concerning the top-down imposition of social reforms) to assert that Atatürk is still perceived as an important leader figure for the majority of Turkish society.

Erdoğan continues to enjoy strong support from his voter base, despite facing various social and economic challenges in the country. A public opinion survey conducted in December 2022 revealed that 80% of those who voted for Erdoğan approved of his performance in office, while his overall approval rating among the general population was 45%.⁴² Erdoğan was subsequently re-elected as president in May 2023 with 52% of the vote. However, his style of governance has prompted more frequent comparisons to leaders such as Viktor Orbán, Javier Bolsonaro, and Donald Trump, all of whom have faced criticism for democratic backsliding and adopting more autocratic methods of governance.⁴³

It may be challenging to objectively compare the ways these two Turkish leaders governed and how they are perceived by society. In the case of Atatürk, we primarily rely on historical narratives, archival materials, and secondary sources to interpret the context of the 1930s. Conversely, Turkey is still governed by Erdoğan, which allows us to observe a trajectory of governance that has shifted from a relatively democratic system to an increasingly autocratic one. However, the similarities, differences, and motivations behind these two decisions provide ample data for a clear understanding of the contexts surrounding these choices and the positions of the two leaders.

In the 1930s, the preservation of cultural heritage was not a societal priority; instead, it was primarily considered by a narrow political elite. The absence of sufficient human resources and institutional frameworks for managing cultural heritage made it impractical to make decisions in an inclusive, expert-driven, and organised manner. Nonetheless, there were some efforts for consultative and participatory processes, such as establishing a commission or preparing reports by state institutions during the conversion of Hagia Sophia into a museum.

By 2020, Turkey had developed a significant level of scientific and professional expertise, along



Fig. 2: The curtains covering the mosaics on the apse semi-dome after the conversion into a mosque, Photo: Barış Altan, October 2024.

with institutional maturity, necessary to handle the complex and delicate nature of Hagia Sophia. However, it still lacked the democratic environment necessary for an open debate and public participation. Capitalising on this gap and strengthening his executive authority, Erdoğan was able to issue a decree to convert Hagia Sophia into a mosque without any consultation.

The transition from an empire to a republic marked a significant shift, yet many societal characteristics remained unchanged and are still evident today. One notable aspect is the tendency to rally around a dominant leader. During the early republican era, this role was personified by Atatürk, who was honoured as the „Father of the Turks“ and the „Senior Teacher,“ a leader dedicated to both protecting and educating the nation.⁴⁴ Similarly, in recent years, Erdoğan has increasingly been referred to as

the „Leader of the Century“ and the „Leader of the Islamic World.“⁴⁵

Eldem argues that “there are few countries where the issue of cultural heritage has been constantly and systematically influenced by political concerns as in Turkey.”⁴⁶ This makes it challenging to answer the question, „Who is a democrat, and who is an autocrat?“, since nearly all power-holders in Turkey’s centennial history have instrumentalised cultural heritage. But, over the past two decades, we have observed intensification of this trend. If politicians and cultural heritage institutions in Turkey could reach a level of maturity that fosters discussion about „What should Hagia Sophia’s function be?“ and „How should this be managed?“ through democratic processes, beyond any doubt, it could contribute to the democratisation efforts of society as a whole.

Figures

- 1 Scaffold in the narthex, *The Mosaics of St. Sophia in Istanbul, Preliminary Report on the First Year's Work, 1931–1932*, by Thomas Whittemore, Plate I.
- 2 The curtains covering the mosaics on the apse semi-dome after the conversion into a mosque, Photo: Barış Altan, October 2024.

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The Heritagisation of Democracy in Germany's Built Landscape

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ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

Das Erstarren des Populismus und ein revitalisierter Nationalismus in Deutschland hat in den letzten Jahren dazu geführt, dass staatliche Stellen und Bürgerinitiativen die demokratische Geschichte und Traditionen des Landes stärker betonen und versuchen, diese neben dem dominierenden „negativen Gedächtnis“ (Reinhart Koselleck) der nationalsozialistischen Herrschaft und des DDR-Regimes in der öffentlichen Erinnerungskultur zu etablieren. Dabei kommt Gebäuden und Orten eine zentrale Rolle zu: Auf höchster politischer Ebene wird gefordert, die Erinnerungsorte der demokratischen Geschichte Deutschlands stärker in den Blick zu nehmen und ihre Aufwertung als zentrale Elemente des kulturellen Erbes mit mehr öffentlichen Mitteln zu fördern. Das Ergebnis war eine landesweite Kampagne bei der Millionen von Euro ausgegeben und Hunderte von Objekten neu entdeckt oder als Orte der deutschen Demokratiegeschichte umgedeutet wurden. Dieser Beitrag stellt die *Heritagisation* der Demokratie in Deutschland seit dem Start dieser Bemühungen 2019 vor. Der Beitrag untersucht den Diskurs über den Nutzen von Gebäuden und Orten zur Stärkung des Engagements für die Demokratie und bietet dann eine theoriegestützte Analyse und Kritik der Interpretationsmethoden und -strategien, die zur Konstituierung ausgewählter Orte als demokratisches Erbe verwendet werden. Ziel ist es, die Diskussion über die politische Rolle und Funktion des kulturellen Erbes voranzutreiben.

ABSTRACT

The rise of populism and renewed nationalism in Germany in recent years has prompted government agencies and citizens' organisations in that country to place increased emphasis on the country's democratic history and traditions, and to try to establish these in public memory culture alongside the dominant "negative memory" (Reinhart Koselleck) of the National Socialist and East German regimes. In this effort, buildings and sites have been assigned a central role: political leaders at the highest levels are calling for greater attention to the *Erinnerungsorte* (sites of memory) of Germany's democratic history, and for increased public funding for their valorisation as key elements of the country's cultural heritage. The result has been a nation-wide campaign of heritage-making, with millions of euros spent and hundreds of objects newly discovered or else reinterpreted as *Orte der deutschen Demokratiegeschichte* (sites of the history of German democracy). This chapter presents the heritagisation of democracy in Germany since the launch of these efforts in 2019. It examines the discourse surrounding the utility of buildings and sites in strengthening commitments to democracy, then offers a theory-based analysis and critique of the interpretive methods and strategies used to constitute selected sites as democratic heritage. The aim is to advance the discussion on the political role and functioning of cultural heritage.

Democracy as Positive Memory

In Germany today, there is frustration in some quarters with the cultural politics of memory and identity that have come to characterise public and political discourse since the 1990s. It is a politics built on what Reinhart Koselleck has called the “negative memory”¹ of National Socialism and the Holocaust, as well as the East German dictatorial regime. This “cosmopolitan memory”,² to use another term for it, is one that encourages a critical coming-to-terms with the difficult past in order to counter nationalism and advance a transnational normative framework of universal human rights.³ It is this framework that in part underlies the European Union, for example. But some, as noted, are frustrated with this negative, cosmopolitan memory, which “has not delivered on its promises in recent decades”⁴ – above all in the states of the former East Germany.

This frustration has been expressed by Björn Höcke, the leader of the extreme-right populist party *Alternative für Deutschland* (AfD) in the state of Thuringia, who denounces Germany's dominant cosmopolitan memory culture as “absurd” and “idiotic”, as having a “paralysing” effect on the country.⁵ He and others on the far right have called for a “180-degree turn” to a more “positive memory”,⁶ one in which National Socialism and the Holocaust are considered just one topic among many; in their view, public memory culture should promote an unproblematic sense of national identity. The most notorious statement of this position came from Alexander Gauland, head of the AfD delegation to Germany's national parliament (Bundestag), during a speech in 2018: there he described the National Socialists as “just a blip” in an otherwise long and glorious history that included not just Hitler but also the emperors Charlemagne and Charles V, then the Prussian King Frederick the Great, and after them Reich Chancellor Otto von Bismarck.⁷ He then evoked cultural heritage as expressive of this proud and heroic national history and memory: in opposition to Berlin's Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe, characterised by Höcke as Germany's “Monument of Shame” (*Denkmal der Schande*) in the heart of its capital,⁸ Gauland positioned the Bamberg Rider and the famous medieval sculptures at Naumburg Cathedral as expressive of an heroic national history and memory.⁹

Germany's mainstream political parties, rather than ignore – or unable to ignore – these calls for a positive memory, have responded first of all by presenting Germany's commitment to coming to terms

with its difficult past as something to be proud of in and of itself, and in that sense a “positive memory”. Indeed, Germany's efforts have made it a “model” for other countries,¹⁰ especially the United States with its unresolved history of slavery and its systemic racism. Thus, for Monika Grütters, Minister of Culture with Germany's ruling Christian Democratic Party in 2016, “One thing is certain: Germany owes its identity and its high standing in the world not least to its confrontation with the past”.¹¹

Second of all, and more importantly for our topic, the mainstream parties have responded by promoting even more strongly the history of democracy in Germany – chequered though that history might be – as a legacy to be acknowledged and even celebrated. Messaging to this effect had in fact been a feature of the interpretation strategy at sites connected to moments and figures playing a role in that history for some time (Fig. 1). But this positive interest in Germany's democratic past became a real trend only in the 2010s, at this moment of resurgent nationalism and populism. In Frankfurt, for example, the Revolution of 1848–49 and the so-called *Paulskirchenparlament* became the focus of renewed attention (Fig. 2). It was a trend actively pushed by the German government: already in 2013, the year the AfD was founded, the coalition agreement between Chancellor Angela Merkel's Christian Democrats (CDU/CSU) and the German Socialist Party (SPD) contained a paragraph on the importance of “*Demokratiegeschichte*”¹², and the next agreement in 2018 was expanded to include a statement of intent to develop a formal “Concept for promoting engagement with the history of democracy”.¹³ Meanwhile, Germany's Federal President Frank-Walter Steinmeier had made raising awareness and promoting understanding of democracy the essential task of his tenure upon taking office in 2017. In what can only be understood as a direct response to the AfD (as well as a thinly veiled reference to controversial projects to reconstruct monuments such as the *Garrisonkirche* in Potsdam and the *Stadtschloss* in Berlin), he said in 2018:

“I would like us to devote more attention, more passion and, yes, more financial resources to the places and the protagonists of our democratic history. For the self-image of our republic, we should invest in more than just the tombs of kings or the castles of princes!”¹⁴

What was needed, in fact, was a wide-ranging, concerted campaign to restore the identification with and commitment to democracy of German society as a whole, as further government messaging made clear. The tone of this messaging has meanwhile become entirely familiar: democracy is not a given, but must be actively cultivated and constantly defended, as Germany's own history shows only too clearly;¹⁵ democracy is always difficult, often frustrating and sometimes painful, and it requires patience, endurance and tolerance;¹⁶ and most importantly, democracy should be understood not just as a principle or a set of rules or a system, and not just as a concern of the professional political class, of elected representatives, or of the power elites – but as a way of life for all (*Demokratie als Lebensform*).¹⁷

“Democracy as a way of life” is not a new formulation – it was introduced by the American philosopher and educator John Dewey in the early decades of the 20th century and was absorbed into German political communication after the Second World War, most prominently by Federal President Theodor Heuss in a famous speech¹⁸ in Heilbronn in 1950 – but it is a catchphrase that has undergone a genuine renaissance in the past few years. In the ongoing discussion within the German government

on how to respond to the populist and nationalist threat and the need for an expansion of public memory discourse, this idea of democracy as a way of life has had a defining influence on shaping policy.

Heritagising Democracy

Very briefly, that policy can be summarised as follows. In June 2019, the German federal parliament passed a motion instructing Chancellor Merkel's government to fulfil its previously stated intentions and submit a “Concept for promoting engagement with the history of democracy”. More specifically, the Concept should describe a funding mechanism by which structures and sites in the built landscape that hold significant connections to the history of democracy in Germany could be made visible and valorised. For this purpose, an annual budget of ten million euros was made available.¹⁹

To provide guidance on which sites should be chosen and how much of this government funding should be awarded to each, the government should consult with the Working Group on Sites of the History of Democracy (*AG Orte der Demokratiegeschichte*).²⁰ The Working Group was formed in Hambach in 2017 as an association of 34 organisations and foundations, most of them attached to or headquartered in buildings associated with a person or event in the history of German democracy. In the meantime, its membership has risen to over 100 such organisations.²¹ Its founding document, the *Hambach Manifesto*, outlines its aims:

“[T]o promote awareness of the history of German democracy and freedom locally, regionally and throughout Germany. To this end, places and events that are already known or less well-known are to be anchored in public memory and further developed as places of learning.”²²

The Working Group itself was one of the first to receive a part of the newly available government funding, to support its project of generating a map (*Kataster*)²³ of such “already known or less well-known” sites in Germany – a kind of inventory or “monuments list” of places of significance to the cultural history of democracy. This is a key point: what the German government is doing with its funding Concept, and what the Working Group is doing with its map and its work of “anchoring” these sites in public memory and developing interpretation plans



Fig. 1: Hambach Castle, the “cradle of German democracy” (10/11/2023).

for them, is attempting to “make heritage”, to “heritagise” democracy in the built landscape.

To be sure, neither the German government nor the Working Group actually describe what they are doing as “heritage-making” or “heritagisation”. Yet, the repeated emphasis on restoring “democracy as a way of life” means that people are not simply to be informed or educated about democracy and its history at these sites (although that is essential, too). Far more than this, they are to be encouraged and supported in valuing and identifying with democracy – in other words, in understanding it as heritage, with everything that this implies. And while “democracy as heritage” is easily said and often said, if taken seriously, the implications are many and profound.

Theorising Heritagisation

For this reason, it seems a pity that these efforts are not being conceptualised as heritage-making, because if they were, the approaches being taken could draw on the insights and tools offered by heritage theory, and might be more effective as a result. For, as a German member of parliament remarked, “People do not automatically become democrats when they visit a site connected to the history of democracy”.²⁴ Rather, such places have to be prepared and shaped to facilitate the processes and practices by which “heritage” emerges out of the encounter between people and buildings or sites.

Theories of heritagisation, of the dynamics of how and why heritage happens – that is, theories of how value-attribution, identification, and attachment work – can help to understand how buildings and sites come to be part of a way of life. In turn, this theory and knowledge can be instrumentalised and operationalised in stimulating heritagisation processes with the goal of cultivating democracy as a way of life. The paragraphs that follow will briefly sketch these dynamics of how and why heritage happens, how identification happens and under what conditions, and hence how it can be *made* to happen.

It makes sense to start at the point where the institutions and organisations themselves start – with a particular building or site. In the broad discourse surrounding the “Sites of the History of German Democracy” programme, there is an assumption that the heritagisation of democracy requires a medium, and that the built environment represents an ideal medium for this process. The assumption is clearly illustrated by one of the major products



Fig. 2: Paulskirche in Frankfurt am Main, meeting place of Germany's first democratic parliament in 1849 (28/09/2023).



Fig. 3: Two-volume set “History of German Democracy” produced in 2020 and 2021 by the organisation Gegen Vergessen – Für Demokratie (21/02/2024).

of this discourse to date: a two-volume series on the *History of German Democracy (Deutsche Demokratiegeschichte)*, on its place in memory culture, and on the challenges of presenting it to the public, produced by a member of the Working Group, the association *Against Forgetting – For Democracy (Gegen Vergessen – Für Demokratie)* (Fig. 3).²⁵ The volumes are subtitled “A Task of Memory-Work” and “A Task of Interpretation-Work” respectively, and their covers make clear that, in this activity, buildings have a central role to play: both picture prominent, easily-recognisable, landmark

buildings associated with the history of democracy in Germany.

The text inside makes the connection explicit. In an essay in the first volume, the historian Bernd Faulenbach, chair of *Gegen Vergessen*, writes: “[I]n contemporary society, the history of democracy requires visualisation”.²⁶ Member of Parliament Katrin Budde (SPD) made similar comments in the Bundestag during the debate on funding the Concept: “It’s good if we also strengthen the sites of German democratic history, authentic sites where you can experience, see, and feel what democracy is and how positive it is.”²⁷ Thus, from the point of view of those involved in this case, the effective remembering and interpretation of democracy requires visible and tangible, that is, material objects, and ideally sites and buildings. Indeed, one could argue that the volumes in fact present the history of German democracy as “a task of heritagisation”.

It is likewise clear that these sites must also be “authentic” – a notoriously slippery concept.²⁸ In the *Nara Document* produced by the International Council on Monuments and Sites in 1994, authenticity is measured by its degree of “credibility”; however, it “may differ from culture to culture, and even within the same culture”,²⁹ and cannot be judged objectively or within fixed criteria. Taking this seriously, one may adopt the position of cultural historian Ien Ang and argue that what counts is “emotional realism”: that is, the authenticity of the feelings that a site is

able to evoke in a visitor.³⁰ This likewise requires a degree of credibility, but people are quite capable and even willing to put aside their doubts – in film studies this is called “suspension of disbelief” – and feel “real” emotions, even if the site is not “authentic” in the sense of its original form or substance.

What is required for the effective “heritagisation” of democracy are therefore visible and tangible objects that are also “credible” in the sense of “emotional realism”. Further requirements can also be identified. In order to be capable of appropriating an object and identifying with it, and to want to do so, it must be possible to attribute a value or values to it. With some objects, this is easy to do: they are “obvious” heritage³¹ by some metric: perhaps because they are visibly old or particularly aesthetically pleasing – as in Alois Riegl’s concepts of age value and artistic value;³² or perhaps because they are of high quality. Great age, beauty and quality are what can be called “affordances” for heritagisation: the term comes from cognitive psychology and describes the features of objects that guide the viewer or user and/or lead them to a certain action.³³

But what if there are no obvious affordances – what if an *Ort der Demokratiegeschichte* is the “opposite of obvious”, is “hidden” or “forgotten”;³⁴ or what if the object only possesses these properties to a very limited extent (Fig. 4)? Here, it can be useful to draw on the theory developed by Mattijs van de Port and Birgit Meyer to analyse “heritage dynamics”:



Fig. 4: Former American Club in Bonn-Plittersdorf, soon to be restored and heritagised as an “Open Embassy for Democracy” (20/02/2024).

“As heritage is not given naturally, persuasion is a necessity. ... [P]eople need to be enticed, captivated, convinced and mobilized to see such [objects] as their heritage: as something that belongs to them and that underpins their belonging, and hence is part of their identity.”³⁵

The repertoire of persuasion includes all kinds of strategies, but together they should have the effect of “emotionally and sensually entangling subjects] with heritage objects”.³⁶ The term “entanglement” is borrowed from quantum physics, where it denotes the complete identification of two bodies or entities. An entanglement strategy in heritage-making employs what Van de Port and Meyer call an “aesthetics of persuasion” – “aesthetics” because the senses and affect play a central role. They write: “[I]t is by being enveloped in a political-aesthetic regime that a form of cultural heritage ceases to be merely an object on display ... but becomes an embodied part of a lived experience”.³⁷ The relevance of such a strategy to the task of heritagising democracy as a way of life is immediately apparent.

The requirements for an effective “heritagisation” of democracy can now be summarised as follows: It is necessary to have a visible and tangible object that is “credible” in the sense of “emotional realism” and is integrated into an aesthetic regime, that is, a sensory-affective regime.

There is one last factor that deserves mention here – one that most heritage theorists agree is essential, and indeed consider to be the affordance of all affordances for heritagisation: narrativity. It must be possible to integrate an object, building, or site into a narrative, and not only into a grand narrative or a master narrative, but also into “a self-narrative that is rich in sensory experiences”.³⁸ As anthropologist David Berliner writes:

“[A]nchor[ing] in a self-narrative [is] a condition of heritage affordance. [...] Heritage defenders always have a story of themselves to tell about the relation they have with the place, the object or the practice. This narrative is biographical [and] usually highly emotional.”³⁹

What this implies in the context of a heritagisation strategy aimed at facilitating identification with democracy is the need for affordances not just for co-authoring of the narrative offered at the site – which are discussed in several contributions in this volume – but also, and importantly, affordances for *contesting* that narrative: that is, openings and opportunities for “retelling” the stories told there, for rewriting the texts inscribed in it using personal and shared memories that disrupt their constructed order.⁴⁰ Such contestation can be highly productive and is itself an eminently democratic pursuit.

Heritagisation and Manipulation

As suggested above, understanding the democracy-promoting efforts of government agencies and citizens' organisations in Germany as a process of “heritagising” the built landscape might help those groups to develop more effective strategies for cultivating democracy as a way of life. At the same time, it must be acknowledged that by operationalising what we know about heritagisation processes in order to *make* those processes happen, we are engaged in a project not just of persuasion but possibly also of manipulation. We know that heritage is never apolitical or in any way neutral; Winfried Speitkamp has described the work of heritage conservation quite rightly as “instrumental, if not manipulative in character”.⁴¹ We also know that populists and nationalists likewise use heritage and its affective and imaginative affordances to persuade others to identify with their world view.⁴² Indeed, in a very real sense, both Björn Höcke, with his insistence on a narrow focus on the “positive memory” of Germany's past as described above, and Alexander Gauland with his evocation of the Bamberg Rider, Uta of Naumburg and other well-known objects, sites and figures of German history and culture, are likewise engaged in a project of “making heritage” in the service of their own conception of the “way of life” to be embraced in this country.

With this in mind, extreme caution and careful reflection are in order. It is worth repeating that democracy is always difficult and sometimes painful; it is not necessarily the case, as was also suggested in the conference discussion, that “democratic values are values that do no harm”. While we may trust that our imperfect mastery of principles such as tolerance, openness and freedom will deliver a net good, it will therefore be necessary to remain very self-conscious and acutely aware of what we and others are doing as heritagisers.

Figures

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Endnotes

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“Emancipation” for a Select Few

Viollet-le-Duc’s Three-Phase Model for the Musée de Sculpture comparée in the Parisian Palais du Trocadéro

SUSANNE MERSMANN

ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

Das *Musée de Sculpture Comparée* wurde 1882 im Pariser Palais du Trocadéro eröffnet, in einer Zeit, in der das Bewusstsein für die Vielfalt der verschiedenen Kulturen nicht mehr nur auf Gruppen wie die französischen Fernreisenden beschränkt war. Dieses Bewusstsein war auch vor Ort in Paris präsent – zum Beispiel durch die Weltausstellungen. Bei der Weltausstellung 1878 im Palais du Trocadéro wurde diskutiert, ob die Ausstellungsinszenierung als kunsthistorisch oder ethnographisch zu bezeichnen sei. Vor diesem Hintergrund verfasste Eugène-Emmanuel Viollet-le-Duc (1814–1879), Mitglied und Inspektor der *Commission des Monuments Historiques*, 1879 zwei Berichte, die für die posthume Umsetzung seines Museumskonzepts entscheidend waren.

In diesem Beitrag wird das Drei-Phasen-Modell der Klassifizierung des Museums untersucht, das auf einem globalisierten Ansatz beruhte. Viollet-le-Duc verknüpfte die einzelnen Phasen mit Regierungsformen und bezog sich hierbei auf ein Zitat von Victor Hugo aus dem Roman *Notre-Dame de Paris* (1832): „Jede Zivilisation beginnt mit der Theokratie und endet mit der Demokratie“. Gleichzeitig nahm Viollet-le-Duc in jeder Phase Exklusionen vor, so dass zum Schluss nur die griechische Klassik und die Kunstwerke des französischen 13. Jahrhunderts als Meisterwerke erscheinen. Es wird erläutert, wie Viollet-le-Duc unter Rückgriff auf die Überlieferung deutscher Autoren, ein Modell konstruierte, das die Demokratie als höchste Regierungsform verdeutlicht, diese aber nur für Personen und Artefakte aus bestimmten europäischen Regionen vorbehält.

ABSTRACT

The *Musée de Sculpture comparée* opened in Paris’s *Palais du Trocadéro* in 1882, during an era when awareness of the diversity of various cultures was no longer limited to groups such as French long-distance travellers. This awareness was present on site in Paris – for instance, as a result of the World’s Fairs. Discussion of the 1878 *Exposition Universelle* (World’s Fair), held at the *Palais du Trocadéro* concerned whether the display of objects should be described as art-historical or ethnographic. In 1879, against this background, Eugène-Emmanuel Viollet-le-Duc (1814–1879), member and inspector of the *Commission des Monuments historiques*, wrote his two *Rapports*, which were crucial for the posthumous implementation of his museum concept by a sub-commission of the *Commission des Monuments historiques*.

This paper explores the museum’s three-phase classification system, which relied on a global approach. Viollet-le-Duc linked the different phases with forms of government, referring to Victor Hugo’s quote from the novel “*Notre-Dame de Paris*” (1832): “Every civilisation begins with theocracy and ends with democracy.” At the same time, Viollet-le-Duc made exclusions at every stage, so that in the end only Greek classical and French 13th-century artworks appear as masterpieces. I will explain how Viollet-le-Duc constructed a model, drawing upon the transmission of German authors, that depicted democracy as the highest form of government, but reserved it solely for individuals and artefacts from certain European regions.

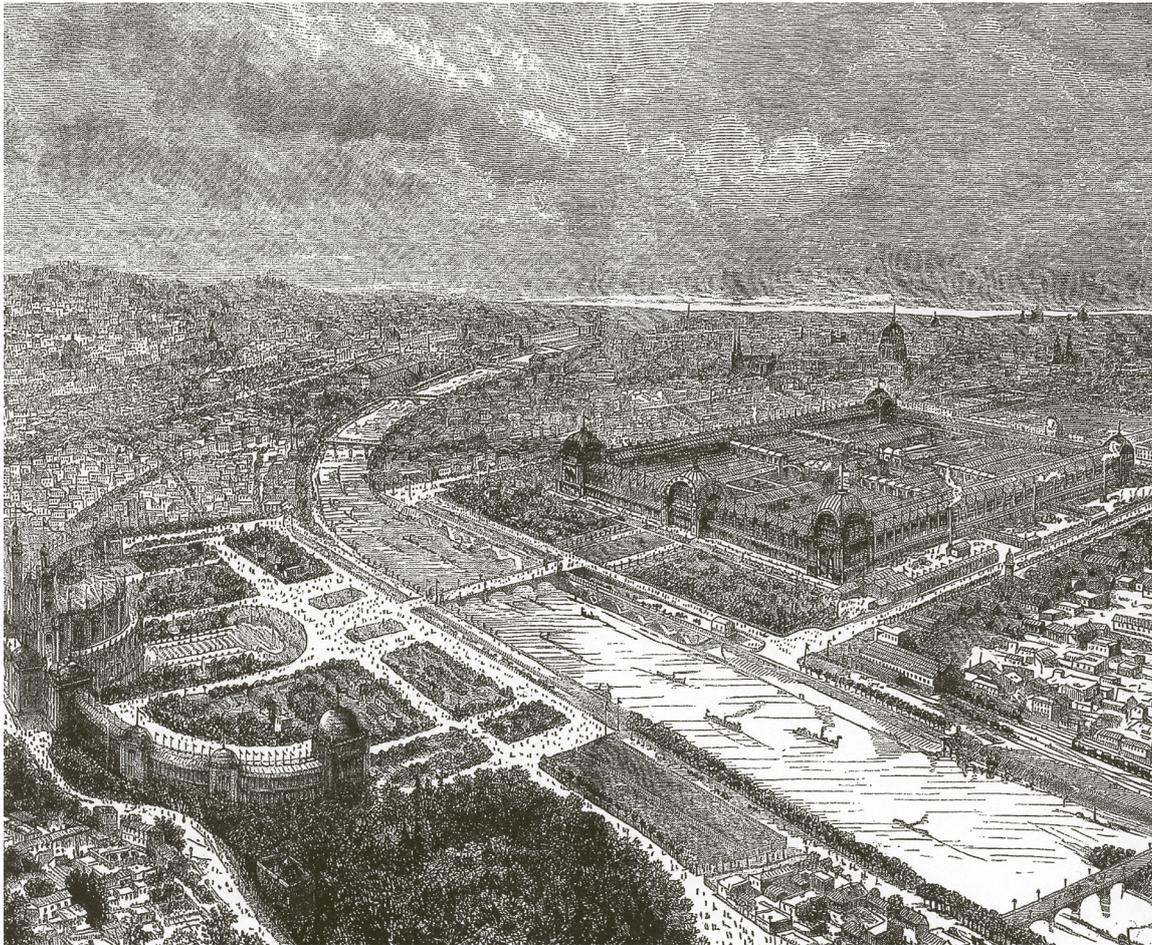


Fig. 1: World's Fair of Paris, Exposition Universelle, 1878, Exhibition surface, print.

Introduction

In 1878, two years after the *Centennial International Exhibition* in Philadelphia, Paris hosted the third French World's Fair. Unlike the second Paris World's Fair of 1867, the site was no longer limited to the Champ de Mars, but extended across the river Seine onto the hill of the Trocadéro (Fig. 1).

The architect, writer, and restorer of medieval architecture, Eugène-Emmanuel Viollet-le-Duc, contributed to selecting the site and supervised construction of the *Palais du Trocadéro*. The floor plan of a series of galleries, in the right wing of the *Palais du Trocadéro* served Viollet-le-Duc as the spatial basis for the concept of the *Musée de Sculpture comparée*. It was in July 1879, the last year of his life, in his *1er* and *2e Rapports*, that he conceived the concept.¹ In 1855, Viollet-le-Duc first attempted to implement a museum in Paris that would display plaster casts of works from the French Middle Ages. In this, he was inspired by London's Crystal Palace (1851) and South Kensington Museum (1852), which already displayed French casts.²

In May 1882, three years after Viollet-le-Duc's death, the *Musée de Sculpture comparée* was inaugurated in the right wing of the *Palais du Trocadéro* according to his written instructions. A month earlier, the *Musée d'Ethnographie du Trocadéro*, a second museum in whose planning Viollet-le-Duc was involved,³ opened in the peristyle and rotunda of the *Palais du Trocadéro*. Both museums were renamed in advance of the 1937 Paris World's Fair – the *Musée de Sculpture comparée* becoming the *Musée des Monuments français*; and the *Musée d'Ethnographie* was renamed the *Musée de l'Homme* (most of its collections are now housed in the *Musée du Quai Branly*). Viollet-le-Duc already did not want to see the collections classified as "ethnographic" in the same building.

As early as 1866, Viollet-le-Duc mentioned, in the article "Sculpture" in his *Dictionnaire raisonné de l'architecture française du XI^e au XVI^e siècle*, the idea of a comparative museum concept highlighting 13th-century French sculpture.⁴ As Viollet-le-Duc spent two months in England in 1850, it is probable that he was familiar with E. A. Freeman's *A Histo-*

ry of Architecture (1849), which is also based on a comparative concept.⁵ In the following I will show how, in his first classification principle for the *Musée de Sculpture comparée* (1879), Viollet-le-Duc highlights the French art of the 13th century in a globalised approach as a master achievement. My aim is to explain how he categorises Greek classical art and French 13th-century artworks within a three-phase model as the “Epoque d’émancipation et de recherche du vrai” (“An epoch of emancipation and the search for truth”) (Fig. 2). At the same time, I will demonstrate how Viollet-le-Duc’s highlighting of 13th-century art is connected to the exclusion of large parts of the world’s population from a development in the arts.

Chez les peuples qui ont atteint un haut degré de civilisation, l'art de la sculpture se divise en 3 périodes:
 Imitation de la nature suivant une interprétation plus ou moins délicate & intelligente.
 Epoque archaïque pendant laquelle on prétend fixer les types. Epoque d'émancipation et de recherche du vrai dans le détail et perfectionnement des moyens d'observation & d'exécution.

Fig. 2: Viollet-le-Duc, 1er Rapport [1879], p. 3, Text extract. [Emphasis by S.M.]

Derivations of the Three-Phase Model

Viollet-le-Duc structured his concept for the *Musée de Sculpture comparée* according to a periodisation that placed greater emphasis on collective developments in art rather than individual progress.⁶ On one occasion he makes reference to the notion of *local genius*, and on another offers a more concrete interpretation of the term *genius*, linking it to a specific historical period.⁷ Two interlocking strands of argumentation constitute the foundation of his three-phase model. Viollet-le-Duc’s approach was primarily informed by a preestablished sequence of state forms delineated by Victor Hugo (1802–1885) in the book chapter “*Ceci tuera cela*” (“This will kill that”) first published in the eighth and definitive edition of the novel “*Notre-Dame de Paris*” in 1831. In the article “*Sculpture*” in the *Dictionnaire raisonné*, Viollet-le-Duc refers directly to Hugo’s chapter, which considers the media upheaval between architecture and the book.⁸ As Martin Bressani has claimed, Hugo’s *Ceci tuera cela* was, to a great extent, an attempt at defining the structure and rhythm of a universal history of architecture. Hugo states: “Every civilisation

begins with theocracy and ends with democracy.”⁹ This wording can also be found with reference to Hugo in the lexical entry “*Civilisation*” in the 1869 *Grand dictionnaire universel du XIXe siècle*.¹⁰ Hugo originally assumed three chronologies in *Ceci tuera cela*, which he then merged into a dual system of juxtapositions: “[...] you will find in the three elder sisters, Hindu, Egyptian, and Romanesque architecture, the same symbol: namely theocracy, caste, unity, dogma, myth, God; and in the three younger sisters, Phoenician, Greek, and Gothic architecture, whatever diversity of form may be inherent in their nature, there is also the same significance: freedom, the people, man.”¹¹ Similar comments can be found in an 1831 report by the first *Inspecteur général des monuments historiques*, Ludovic Vitet, who argues concerning Gothic art: “Its principle lies in emancipation, in freedom, in the spirit of association and community, in feelings that are entirely indigenous and entirely national; it is bourgeois and, what’s more, it is French, English, Teutonic, and so on.”¹²

Focusing solely on France, an analogy to this idea can be found in the article “*Architecture*” in the *Dictionnaire raisonné*: “We must not forget that French architecture was created in the midst of the conquered people in the face of their conquerors; it drew its inspiration from the heart of this indigenous faction, the most numerous of the nation; it fell into the hands of the laics as soon as the first attempts at emancipation were made; it was neither theocratic nor feudal.” This is initially about a laicist emancipation in a national context.¹³

Secondly, and this is directed by Viollet-le-Duc towards a globalised framework, he constructed imaginary communities, which he summarised under the term “race”. In France, the term “race” was initially applied within an aristocratic context, referring to the genealogical tree of noble families.¹⁴ Around 1684, François Bernier introduced the term into a discourse of natural sciences.¹⁵ In his construction of imaginary communities, Viollet-le-Duc relied partly on the book *Le Règne Animal* (1817) written by Georges Cuvier, and partly on Arthur de Gobineau, with whom he corresponded between 1861 and 1871,¹⁶ and who must be considered a key exponent of the ideology of racial thought.¹⁷ At the core, as with these two writers, Viollet-le-Duc distinguished three large “human races” (“*racés humaines*”), ascribing immutable traits to them. Unlike François Bernier, Viollet-le-Duc attributed a hierarchical system to his accumulation of “races,” the lowest rank of which

should fill out a Black race (*"race noire"*) and the uppermost rank a White race (*"race blanche"*):

"This, the aryan race [sic!], the white race by excellence, is provided with warrior instincts; it gives birth to heroes; it dominates, it rules; it establishes the first religions, it regulates their worship; it despises manual work and forms societies consisting of shepherds and warriors, with patriarchy as the principle of any government. This other, the yellow race, the largest perhaps on our planet, is industrious, engaged in business, calculating, agriculture, manual work; it is skilled in metalworking; it lends itself easily to any work, provided it catches a glimpse of a purely material well-being; devoid of high aspirations, of philosophical foundation, with little concern for the unknown, it remains calm during the day in hand, thanks to its work and its industry, raised to a fair social order. The third, the black race, is ardent, violent, recognises no other power than physical force, superstitious, guided by its physical needs or by its mobile and disordered imagination."¹⁸

Against the background of these racist stereotypes, which were widespread in Europe during the 19th century, Viollet-le-Duc imposed decisive evaluative attributes on the human combinations he created. Domination and subjugation are hereby argumentations originating from the Enlightenment, as reflected in the characterisation of the *"race blanche"* ("it rules") and the *"race noire"* ("recognises no other power than physical force"). Contrary to the equality claim of Enlightenment philosophy, such arguments were applied to justify the enslavement of people.¹⁹ Concerning Freeman, Alex Bremner notes that he does not use the word *"Aryan"* once in his *"History..."* but that the construct connected with the word, to which I will refer in the next paragraph, is also part of his thinking.²⁰ It is also striking that Viollet-le-Duc equates the White race with "patriarchy". This can very likely be seen as part of the fixed ideological pattern in which the "White race" configures as male, and the "Black race" as female.²¹

Drawing on Cuvier, Viollet-le-Duc assumed that the ascribed personality traits are not to be considered as individual or changeable, but rather as genetically implied factors. Whereas Cuvier created a

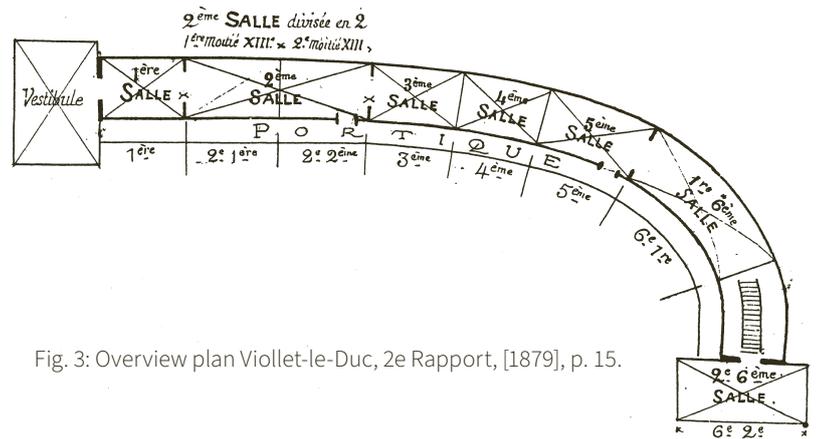


Fig. 3: Overview plan Viollet-le-Duc, 2e Rapport, [1879], p. 15.

background for Viollet-le-Duc's biologicistic constructions, other sources inspired his orientation towards linguistic – Viollet-le-Duc applied the term *"aryane"* – assumptions. Sir William Jones (1746–1794) had, within the scope of his work for the Asiatic Society of Bengal, established foundations for recognising the relationship between the Indian (mainly Sanskrit) and the European languages. In his writings, we see a linguistic distinction between "Semites" on the one hand and "Persians and Indians" on the other. Jones regarded language as an essential criterion for the assessment of peoples,²² a view followed particularly by German authors such as the Schlegel brothers and Herder. As Léon Poliakov has indicated, they laid the cornerstone for the myth of a supposedly superior "Aryan race".²³ In his three-phase model, Viollet-le-Duc resorted to biological as well as linguistic constructions of "race".

"Imitation of Nature" – Exclusion

Viollet-le-Duc's classification of eras began with a phase of "imitation de la nature," followed by an "époque hiératique," and an "époque d'émancipation" that he described as the point of culmination. He omitted the "imitation de la nature" from the spatial implementation, as he did not assign any artistic status to the objects ascribed to this phase. The spatial design immediately begins in Room 1 with the second phase (Fig. 3). Room 2 was double the size of Room 1 and dedicated to the "époque d'émancipation". In contrast, he described Rooms 3, 4, and 5 as eras of decadence. He planned only for Room 4 an exhibition of works originating from the Italian Renaissance. Finally, in Room 6, the three-phase model initially applied to "statues" was transferred to "ornamental sculptures".

The fact that Viollet-le-Duc did not intend the phase of "imitation de la nature" for the spatial implementation does not indicate that to him it was

marginal. The basis of his historical narrative is found in the comments on this phase. We read at the start of the relevant paragraph: “In the most ancient monuments of history [...]”.²⁴ This formulation, however, is not meant to be the beginning of Viollet-le-Duc’s chronology. Instead, he put forward here: “[...] a kind of return to the earliest times,”²⁵ referring to a prehistoric era.²⁶ In a lecture at the Sorbonne, Viollet-le-Duc characterised the three “races” he had adopted through the attribution of dwellings that he considered original to them.²⁷ He described the “race noire” as the one least able to interfere with nature and which chose to inhabit caves. As a template for the dwellings of the “jaunes,” a beaver lodge would have served, hereby referring to the combination of various materials used. The “aryans,” however, would have intensively processed the nature they encountered from the start and built huts using wood.

Viollet-le-Duc described the sketched preliminaries of his lecture as: “presentation preceding historical times”.²⁸ The “imitation of nature” can be located during this epoch with regard to the allocation of different developmental abilities to different “races”. In his lecture, Viollet-le-Duc transferred a topos of historiography onto the “race noire” he had constructed. Here, he comments: “The first [meaning “the White race”] has a regular history, a series of more or less advanced civilisations, moments of surprising splendour.”²⁹ About the constructed “race noire,” Viollet-le-Duc stated: “[...] others are now what they were twenty centuries ago, and their contact with the civilisation of the European peoples has had no other result than communicating to them the needs and vices they were unaware of, without bringing them on the path of true progress.”³⁰ Viollet-le-Duc’s presentation comprises structures of the topos of ahistoricity as mainly transferred onto Africa.³¹ Despite claiming to be writing the history of the world, an extra-historical existence was simultaneously attributed to a large part of the Earth’s population. The German philosopher Hegel commented with emphasis that: “[Africa] is no historical part of the world; it has no movement or development to exhibit. [...] What we properly understand by Africa is the unhistorical, undeveloped spirit, still involved in the conditions of mere nature, and which had to be presented here only as on the threshold of the World’s History. Having eliminated this introductory element, we find ourselves for the first time on the real theatre of History.”³²

In his lecture at the *École des Beaux-arts* (1864) and presentation at the Sorbonne (1866), Viollet-le-Duc connected the outset of the history of art with the occurrence of a first form of government. He opined that only the “race blanche” was able to govern, in contrast to the “race nègre,” which was deprived – in his view – of being able to establish regulations.³³ Already at this point, Viollet-le-Duc excluded, among others, the largest part of Africa from the history of art.

“Époque Hiératique” – Dialectical

In the comments on the first room, the limits of the northern space, he envisaged displaying: Egyptian, Assyrian, and subsequently early Greek sculpture.³⁴ The entire southern space was reserved for presenting works from the French Romanesque era. Due to their exhibition at the Louvre in 1827, ancient Egyptian objects (and, from 1847 onwards, Assyrian culture) had already been incorporated into the Western artistic canon.

Viollet-le-Duc linked the concept of the beginning of art history, which he situated geographically in Asia and explicitly in India, to the “époque hiératique.”³⁵ We are speaking of the myth of “a superior Aryan race,” as represented by the French linguist Ernest Renan in his writings.³⁶ Viollet-le-Duc described “la race aryane” as legitimising the hierarchical caste system of the Hindu religion. In his arthistorical considerations, he included views from *Du génie des Religions* by Edgar Quinet.³⁷ In the chapter “De la Renaissance orientale,” Quinet treated the discovery of Hindu manuscripts as equal to the discovery of the Iliad and the Odyssey. In many parts of Viollet-le-Duc’s lecture at the *École des Beaux-arts*, the Hindu religion shapes the narrative.

Viollet-le-Duc’s consideration of Indian art is, however, dialectical: As the alleged beginning of art history, it is given a special place. On the other hand, he did not admit to any artistic progression of such works. Under the term “peuples orientaux,” Viollet-le-Duc categorised the entire subcontinent as a conglomerate of divergent peoples at the stage of “époque hiératique”. The determinations for the “époque hiératique” are based on a model of history that rests on two factors: the properties attributed to the constructed “races” on the one hand, and their encounter on the other hand. Together, they form the argumentation framework of the “époque hiératique” as well as of the “époque d’émancipation”.

In his lecture at the Sorbonne, Viollet-le-Duc stated: "From the standpoint of art, two social conditions produce opposite results: the regime of upper caste art develops very quickly but takes a hieratic form; as to the regime struggles, which in the long run lead to mergers, art develops slowly, step by step, seeking its ways, but grows every day, reaching a point of culmination at which even it does not know how to stop, and rather than stay calm, loses the great and beautiful ways to fall in research."³⁸

Viollet-le-Duc's descriptions link racial constructions to Victor Hugo's proposed succession of political systems. Theocracy acquires validity in the "époque hiératique". Viollet-le-Duc connects this in direct compliance with Hugo to the Hindu caste system. Different from his contemporaries Ludovic Vitet and Albert Lenoir, Viollet-le-Duc excluded any "oriental" influence on French art of the 13th century.³⁹ He marginalised, mainly through his scheme, all those peoples of a higher development in their artistic productions within the "époque d'émancipation", which he combined with an image of the "orient". The extent to which the idea of the "orient" could be stretched from a scientifically ambitious perspective in France at the time was explained by Victor Hugo's introductory sentences in the cycle of poems, *Les Orientales*: "We now have a scholar in every Oriental idiom, from China to Egypt."⁴⁰

For a Few – "Era of Emancipation"

Viollet-le-Duc planned Room 2 (Fig. 3) to be twice as large as Room 1, indicating that the second room marked the culmination of his three-phase model. Greek sculpture dating from the Classical Era was to be placed on an axis in the middle of the room,⁴¹ whereas French art dating from the 13th century would be placed along the walls. On this occasion, Viollet-le-Duc differentiated between the French art of the first and the second halves of the 13th century, subdividing each into the regional manifestations of Ile-de-France, Champagne, Picardy, and Burgundy.

Viollet-le-Duc mentions the figure of the prophet on the left doorjamb of the west-central portal of the Reims Cathedral as an example from Champagne.⁴² He saw a tangible resemblance between this figure and that of Mausolus from the ancient Greek city of Halicarnassus. In both the prophet from Reims and Mausolus from Halicarnassus, he presumed to

recognise individual portraits. Viollet-le-Duc thus dated the emergence of the personal portrait, usually linked to the Italian Renaissance, back to ancient Greece and 13th-century French art. He let it appear that the works of these two eras represented the culmination of art history.

As mentioned, the term "emancipation" can also be found in the writings of Vitet and in the article on "Architecture" in the *Dictionnaire raisonné*. The full term, "époque d'émancipation," also in relation to Gothic architecture, was previously used by Viollet-le-Duc in the 1859 article "Construction" from the *Dictionnaire raisonné*. In the manner of a recurring binational competition with England, Viollet-le-Duc writes: "Anglo-Norman buildings are generally executed with much greater care than our own; but to know one is to know them all: there is no evidence of the new, bold inspirations that tormented our architects in the early days of Gothic art, a veritable period of intellectual emancipation for the working classes of northern France."⁴³

Conclusion

Charles L. Davis II, who has also researched Viollet-le-Duc, has noted with regard to the USA that: "The romantic mythologies of the American frontier that underwrote the most popular definitions of American character in the nineteenth century almost exclusively focused upon clarifying the shifting boundaries of whiteness that were being pluralized by the democratic experiment."⁴⁴ At the same time, he also made it clear that this "pluralization" also goes hand in hand with a national demarcation to the world. Viollet-le-Duc locates himself within a bourgeois emancipation, which in part sets itself apart from the nobility.⁴⁵ In the *Histoire de l'habitation humaine* (1875), he omitted the female sex from the historiography of architecture – just as he had previously done through applying the term "patriarchy". The portraits in the various chapters can be read as male due to the growth of the beard. With regard to Hugo, Claude Millet noted that until 1850 his concept of democracy was close to the term "civilisation,"⁴⁶ which Hugo used to refer foremost to public instruction. Compared to Hugo, Viollet-le-Duc's concept of "civilisation" is located closer to that of "race," which leads him to the exclusions evident in his concept for the *Musée de Sculpture comparée*.⁴⁷

Figures

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- 2 Susanne Mersmann, *Die Museen du Trocadéro. Viollet-le-Duc und der Kanondiskurs im Paris des 19. Jahrhunderts*, Berlin 2012, p. 132–150.
- 3 Viollet-le-Duc wrote a report on the choice of an appropriate architecture for the ethnographic museum: Viollet-le-Duc, Rapport (lu dans la séance du 30 octobre 1878), fait au nom de la sous-commission de l'approbation d'un local pour le Musée ethnographique, in: Ernest-Théodore Hamy, *Les Origines du Musée d'Ethnographie*, Paris 1890. Reprint with preface by Nélia Dias. [= Les cahiers de Gradhiva; 7], Paris 1988, p. 295–302.
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- 8 Mersmann 2012 (See note 2), p. 151; Laurent Baridon, *L'imaginaire scientifique de Viollet-le-Duc*, Paris 1996, p. 166 and p. 270.
- 9 Victor Hugo, *Notre-Dame de Paris* (1832), in: Victor Hugo: *Ceuvres complètes, Roman, III*, Paris 1880, p. 195.
- 10 Anon., Civilisation, in: *Grand dictionnaire universel du XIX^e siècle français, historique géographique, mythologique, bibliographique, littéraire, artistique, scientifique*, etc., par Pierre Larousse. 15 vol. + Suppléments, Paris 1866–1890; Vol. 4 1869, p. 366–372, p. 366.
- 11 Victor Hugo, *Notre-Dame de Paris* (a new translation by Alban Kraillsheimer), New York 1993, p. 198.
- 12 See Ludovic Vitet, *Les monuments historiques du Nord-Ouest de la France*, in: Vitet, *Etudes sur l'histoire de l'Art*, Sér. 2. Moyen-Âge, Paris, 1864. p. 327–380, p. 153; With regard to “freedom” and identity politics, with a focus on the US and France, see Tyler Stovall, *White Freedom. The Racial History of an Idea*, Princeton 2021, p. 1.
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- 24 Émile Alglave [transcript writer], in: Esthétique appliquée à l’histoire de l’art. Cours de M. Viollet-le-Duc, Reprint, in: Geneviève Viollet-le-Duc (Ed.), *Esthétique appliquée à l’histoire de l’art*, Paris (1864) 1994, p. 15.
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- 26 On the concept of prehistory, see Cécile Debry, Rémi Labrusse, and Maria Stavrinaki (Ed.), *Préhistoire. Une énigme moderne* (exhibition catalog Paris, Centre Pompidou 2019), Paris 2019.
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- 28 Eugène-Emmanuel Viollet-le-Duc, De l’architecture dans ses rapports avec l’histoire. Conférence à la Sorbonne. Du 4 février 1867 [sic!], in: *Gazette des Architectes et du Bâtiment*, 1866b. No. 23, p. 353–364, p. 354.
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- 32 G. W. F. Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of History*. Transl. from the third German edition by J. Sibree. London 1857, p. 103–104. See an analogous concept by Victor Cousin in Susanne Mersmann, “... les yeux fixés du côté de l’orient” Des prémices de la conception du Musée de Sculpture comparée d’après Viollet-le-Duc, Heidelberg 2024, p. 10, https://archiv.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/artdok/9362/1/Mersmann_les_yeux_2024.pdf.
- 33 Viollet-le-Duc 1866a (See note 4), p. 99.
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- 35 See Alglave (1864) 1994 (See note 24), p. 15–16; Viollet-le-Duc 1866b (See note 28), p. 353–364, p. 353–354.
- 36 See in a balanced argumentation Rabault-Feuerhahn 2015 (See note 22).
- 37 See Mersmann 2012 (See note 2), p. 166–171.
- 38 Viollet-le-Duc 1866b (See note 28), p. 354.
- 39 See Martin Bressani, *Architecture and the Historical Imagination. Eugène-Emmanuel Viollet-le-Duc, 1814–1879*, Farnham 2014, p. 180. See in contrast the INHA’s series of events “*Abstractions en période médiévale*,” which in the moment also examines shared developments.
- 40 Victor Hugo, Les Orientales (1829), in: Hugo: *Oeuvres complètes de Victor Hugo. Poésie II*, Paris 1882, p. (3)–247, p. 7.
- 41 Viollet-le-Duc 1879b (See note 1), p. 2.
- 42 Viollet-le-Duc 1866a (See note 4), p. 152; Mersmann 2012 (See note 2), p. 177.
- 43 Eugène-Emmanuel Viollet-le-Duc, Construction, in: *Dictionnaire raisonné de l’architecture française du XIe au XVIe siècle*, vol. 4, Paris 1859, p. 1–279, p. 125–126.
- 44 Davis 2019 (See note 31), p. 6
- 45 Bressani 2014 (See note 39), p. 133 and p. 194 notes how Viollet-le-Duc also divides French society into three classes and counts himself among the bourgeoisie.
- 46 Claude Millet, Démocratie, in: Claude Millet and David Charles (Ed.), *Dictionnaire Victor Hugo*, Paris 2023, p. 263–265, p. 263.
- 47 See for example also the entry “Civilisation” in the Bescherelle from 1856: “Civilisation ... Aptitudes of the divers races of mankind to civilisation.” Mersmann 2012 (See note 2), p. 150. It is sometimes expressed that there was no exchange in the 19th century, but there were also contact zones in addition to the World’s Fairs. Gaspard Félix Tournachon, known as Nadar, made a portrait photograph of Viollet-le-Duc in January 1878. See, e.g., Mersmann 2012 (See note 2), p. 101. Denis Murrell, *Posing Modernity. The Black Model from Manet and Matisse to Today* (exhibition catalogue Wallach Art Gallery, New York), New Haven/London 2018, has dealt with Nadar’s photographs among others of Black Parisiens. See Adrienne L. Childs, Exhibition Review of Le Modèle noir de Géricault à Matisse, in: *Nineteenth-Century Art Worldwide*, 18 (2019), No. 2, <https://www.19thc-art-worldwide.org/autumn19/childs-reviews-le-modele-noir-de-gericault-a-matisse> (23 April 2025).

Hambach Castle

Historic and Contemporary Cultural Claims

GEORG MAYBAUM, BIRGIT FRANZ

ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

30.000 Menschen zogen 1832 von Neustadt an der Haardt hinauf zur Ruine des Hambacher Schlosses, um für nationale Einheit, Freiheit und Volkssouveränität zu streiten. Seitdem wird dieser Ort immer wieder politisch vereinnahmt. Der Artikel verknüpft Fakten und Interpretationen und setzt diese in Bezug zu Ort, Raum, Bausubstanz und Zeitgeschichte.

Unbeschadet der Neuordnung Europas im Wiener Kongress war es in der zum Königreich Bayern gehörigen Rheinpfalz gelungen, die Errungenschaften der französischen Institutionen fortzuschreiben, was die Pfalz zu einer Hochburg des europäischen Frühliberalismus machte. Die zum Fest führende Initiative ging von Herausgebern diverser Zeitschriften aus und wurde von Redakteuren, Schriftstellern und Vaterlandsvereinen begeistert aufgenommen. Unter den Festteilnehmern waren nicht nur Deutsche der besitz- und bildungsbürgerlichen Opposition, sondern auch zahlreiche Franzosen und Polen. Das Hambacher Schloss wird folglich als Wiege deutscher und europäischer Demokratiegeschichte gesehen.

Die wechselnden Deutungshoheiten der letzten 200 Jahre führten zu regen Bautätigkeiten, neuen Nutzungen und gegensätzlichen Narrativen. Die Weimarer Republik glorifizierte das Hambacher Schloss und auch die Bundesrepublik Deutschland nutzte dessen Symbolkraft. Die CDU-geführte Landesregierung schloss 1982 alle anderen politischen Kräfte von der Planung einer Dokumentationsstätte aus. 1985 stellte die in der Opposition befindliche SPD sich hier dem Besuch Ronald Reagans entgegen.

Das Hambacher Schloss gehört seit 2007 zur Straße der Demokratie und trägt seit 2015 das Europäische Kulturerbesiegel. Und dennoch – oder gerade deshalb – wurde es jüngst von demokratiefeindlichen Kräften der rechtspopulistischen Szenen als Kristallisationspunkt obskurer Geschichtsinterpretationen auserkoren.

ABSTRACT

In 1832, 30,000 people marched from Neustadt an der Haardt up to the ruins of Hambach Castle to fight for national unity, freedom and the sovereignty of the people. Since then, this place has been politically appropriated time and again. The article combines facts and interpretations and relates these to the location, space, building fabric and contemporary history.

Notwithstanding the reorganisation of Europe at the Congress of Vienna, the Rhine Palatinate, which belonged to the Kingdom of Bavaria, succeeded in continuing the achievements of French institutions, making the Palatinate a stronghold of early European liberalism. The initiative leading to the festival came from the publishers of various journals and was enthusiastically received by editors, writers and patriotic associations. Among the participants were not only Germans from the propertied and educated middle-class opposition, but also numerous French and Poles. Hambach Castle is therefore seen as the cradle of German and European democratic history.

The changing interpretations of the last 200 years have led to lively construction activity, new uses and conflicting narratives. The Weimar Republic glorified Hambach Castle and the Federal Republic of Germany also utilised its symbolic power. In 1982, the CDU-led state government excluded all other political forces from planning a documentation centre. In 1985, the SPD, which was in opposition, opposed Ronald Reagan's visit here.

Hambach Castle has been part of the *Straße der Demokratie* since 2007 and has borne the European Heritage Label since 2015. And yet - or precisely because of this - it has recently been chosen by anti-democratic forces in the right-wing populist scenes as a crystallisation point for obscure interpretations of history.



Fig. 1: Hambach festival by Chr. Heinfeld, contemporary pen and ink lithograph, 21.8 x 26.7 cm (1832).

Introduction

This article on Hambach Castle and its associated historic and contemporary cultural claims has to start with the *Hambacher Fest* (Hambach Festival). The Hambach Festival was celebrated on 27–30 May 1832 at Hambach Castle, near Neustadt an der Haardt in the then Bavarian Rhine district, an exclave of the Kingdom of Bavaria.¹ The event was disguised as a non-political gathering in order to circumvent censorship and other restrictions. Approximately twenty- to thirty-thousand people walked up the hill to meet at the ruins of Hambach Castle.²

The event was one of the main public demonstrations in support of German unity, freedom, and democracy in the first half of the 19th century, thereby making Hambach Castle an icon of the German democratic movement.³ Participants came from all layers of society: Workmen, women, students, and members of parliament.⁴ They travelled from all over

Germany as well as from France, Poland, and even England.⁵ The main demands of the meeting were liberty, civil and political rights, as well as national unity.

The festival cemented the combination of black, red, and gold as symbolising a democratic Germany. After World War I, these colours were adopted by the Weimar Republic, and still comprise the flag of the present-day Federal Republic of Germany.

A watercolour painting reproduced in numerous variations⁶ shows a joyful procession winding its way up to the castle, comprising women, men, and children in festive dresses, most wearing hats and fine shoes. A marquee is shown to the left of the castle and firecrackers are being set off. The men in the foreground are carrying the black, red, and gold flag. Immediately next to it is the white and red flag of the Polish participants, and on the right edge of the picture the blue, white, and red tricolour of France.

According to the caption, the picture is based on an older black and white sketch. A coloured version is included as Fig. 1, showing the flag in the historically correct reverse order, corresponding to the tricolour introduced by the student fraternities. If we superimpose the two images, we first notice only one flag in the foreground, suggesting that the Polish flag was added later in honour of the officers and soldiers who were forced to flee their homeland.⁷ The tricolour has also been edited. Formerly horizontal red, gold, and black stripes, it was later recoloured to depict the vertical bars of the blue, white, and red French tricolour.

Countless variations of this image have been published, differing in their colouring and details. One even shows the procession ascending the hill in the opposite direction. The fact that the modified version (but lacking the French tricolour) found its way onto a German postage stamp in 2007 is therefore rather remarkable.

In 2013 the procession scene was reproduced by Bruno Peeters as a diorama for the *Historical Museum of the Palatinate* (now on display at the Hambach Castle),⁸ utilising 402 *Playmobil* figures. It should be

mentioned in passing that the *Playmobil* diorama displays the historically accurate flag of 1832 (gold, red, and black), which is hoisted on the keep.

One of the flags purportedly carried at the Hambach Festival now hangs in the newly remodelled state parliament of Rhineland-Palatinate.⁹ Another flag embroidered by Palatinate women with the words „*Deutschlands Wiedergeburt*“ is preserved in Hambach Castle.¹⁰ However, the two words, „*Germany's rebirth*“, cannot be clearly assigned: Which German state could one have referred to in 1832, given that unification did not occur until several decades later and was not formally completed until 1871?

The Hambach Festival was characterised by numerous speeches, listing more than 20 well-known individuals: The speakers discussed the sad condition of Germany¹¹; its insignificance in the council of European nations; its decline in trade and commerce; the division into thirty-eight states¹², large and small, with their different laws, currencies, weights, and measures, and – most of all – the customs barriers between each state.¹³ The speech by Johann Georg August Wirth, one of the leading figures of the Hambach Festival, ended with the excla-



Fig. 2: Hambach Castle by Theodor Verhas, watercolour, 10 cm x 15 cm (1839).

mation: „*Cheers! Three cheers for the confederate republican Europe!*“¹⁴

A delegation of approximately 20 Polish emigrants took part in the procession from the Neustadt marketplace up to the castle ruin. The reason for this was the suppression of the Polish National Government by Russian troops. About 10,000 emigrants (other sources cite significantly higher numbers) fled Poland in the so-called Great Emigration, travelling to France via the German states. They were well received, especially in Saxony, Baden, and Bavaria, where several pro-Polish patronage associations arose. This pro-Polish support expressed at Hambach was the climax of German liberals' enthusiasm for Poland.¹⁵

Three of the Polish emigrants gave a speech at the Hambach Festival, among these a young ensign, the bearer of the regimental flag. In view of this history, it was certainly logical to invite representatives of the Polish opposition, namely members of the *Solidarność* trade union, to the 150th anniversary celebrations in 1982. When peace activists proposed this, Germany's ruling Christian Democrat Party vigorously objected.¹⁶ Similarly, the entire history of the festival and the castle concerns repeated attempts at politically motivated inclusion, exclusion, and appropriation.

Building History

In spring of 1832, Hambach Castle was in ruins. The roof and false ceilings were missing and the walls had partially collapsed (Fig. 2). It seems paradoxical that this old manor house became the “cradle of German democracy”!¹⁷

The building's ruinous state was due to its uselessness as a castle, combined with the effects of numerous armed conflicts during the past centuries and many changes of ownership: In the first construction period, it was the Romans and Celts who formed small settlements here.¹⁸

The Salian dynasty had the first castle built as an imperial fortress in the first half of the 11th century, the so called *Kästenburg* (in High German: Kastanienburg). The name derives from the chestnut trees introduced by the Romans, which still characterise many townscapes in Palatinate.

In the 11th century, the building passed to the cathedral monastery in Speyer, which then owned it for around 700 years. During the Peasants' War (1524–1525) insurgents occupied the castle. According to legend, the zeal with which they quick-

ly and violently smashed the wine barrels stored in the cellar was their undoing, as they subsequently drowned in a flood of the divine drink.¹⁹

The French then devastated the estate during the Palatinate War of Succession in 1688. The castle fell into disrepair and remained unused. As a result of the French Revolution in 1789 and the occupation of the territories on the left bank of the Rhine, it fell to the French state, which had no interest in this symbol of extinct dynasties.

Following the Vienna Congress of 1815, the historic Palatinate region and hence Hambach Castle became part of the Kingdom of Bavaria. Fortunately, Bavarian authorities retained some constitutional rights from the Napoleonic era. Therefore, the formerly French Palatinate became a refuge of last resort for liberal authors and intellectuals.

In 1822, the castle passed into the private ownership of ten Palatinate citizens for 625 guilders.²⁰ In January 1832 a number of journalists established a democratic association for freedom of the press and speech, which was almost immediately banned by the state government. In turn, the initiators called for a festival at Hambach Castle, as overt demonstrations were prohibited.

The Hambach events prompted the German Federal Convention²¹ to issue its decree of 28 June 1832, which once again tightened the Carlsbad Decrees (20 September 1819) and completely suppressed freedom of expression. As a result, three of the four main organisers of the meeting, Philipp Jakob Siebenpfeiffer²² and the lawyers Friedrich Schüler and Georg Ferdinand Geib, fled the Bavarian Rhine district, while a fourth, Johann Georg August Wirth, decided to stay and was sentenced to two years in prison.

Around ten years after the Hambach Festival, a group of citizens formed who wanted to give the castle to the Bavarian Crown Prince Maximilian²³ on the occasion of his wedding. Perhaps surprisingly, the group included participants from 1832.

After King Ludwig I,²⁴ the crown prince's father, had accepted the gift, the royal family commissioned August von Voit to draw up plans for the Maxburg.²⁵ Beforehand, however, the crown prince commissioned the building councillor Friedrich Ziebland draw up site and floor plans and had the civil inspector Ferdinand Jodl conduct a detailed building survey, which remains an impressive elaboration today.²⁶

August von Voit designed a palace with the appearance of a fairytale castle in a Gothic Reviv-

al style: Many turrets, walls crowned with battlements, and numerous larger windows, which is why the outer walls had to be demolished down to the lowest storey and then rebuilt with thicker walls to provide sufficient stability.²⁷

Construction initially progress well, but stagnated around 1846. This was partly due to the looming revolution of 1848, which culminated in the general assembly of democratic forces at St Paul's Church in Frankfurt. On the other hand, Ludwig's amorous entanglements also played an important role. In 1846, he met and fell in love with the Irish dancer Lola Montez. As this relationship was intolerable in many respects, Ludwig voluntarily abdicated on 20 March 1848 in favour of his eldest son Maximilian.

However, he wanted to continue the construction of Villa Ludwigshöhe in the nearby Edenkoben, which had been in planning since 1843. In these difficult times for the royal family, it was by no means opportune to invest large sums in two prestigious buildings – the villa and Hambach Castle. As a result, the construction of Maxburg Castle ceased.

Anniversaries

Apart from the use of the grounds for family picnics, the castle was only visited on the anniversaries of the Hambach Festival. On the first anniversary in 1833, the Bavarian military controlled the area, de-

spite the fact that the Castle was still private property! In addition, they dispersed all attempts to hold another gathering.²⁸

The 40th anniversary of the Hambach Festival was celebrated in 1872, the year after the founding of the German Empire. The focus was on Germany's unification after the war against France.²⁹ Ten years later, the Social Democrats (still called the Socialist Labour Party of Germany) took the opportunity to commemorate the 50th anniversary. The festival was again commemorated in 1922, by the German Democratic Party, a left-liberal party of the Weimar Republic.³⁰

The working group of the Palatinate press was responsible for the 100th anniversary celebrations in 1932: German Unity and Freedom Day was celebrated in this last year of the Weimar Republic. The announcement was dominated by an oversized eagle, as was also customary in the Third Reich.³¹ Even then, before the Nazis came to power, they protested against the participation of members of the Jewish religious community. Incidentally, the Nazis were the only party (to date) that did not lay claim to the castle.

In 1956, the town of Neustadt bought the building. The castle itself was in a largely ruinous state, and therefore various smaller construction projects began in the 1960s. The palace building was roofed

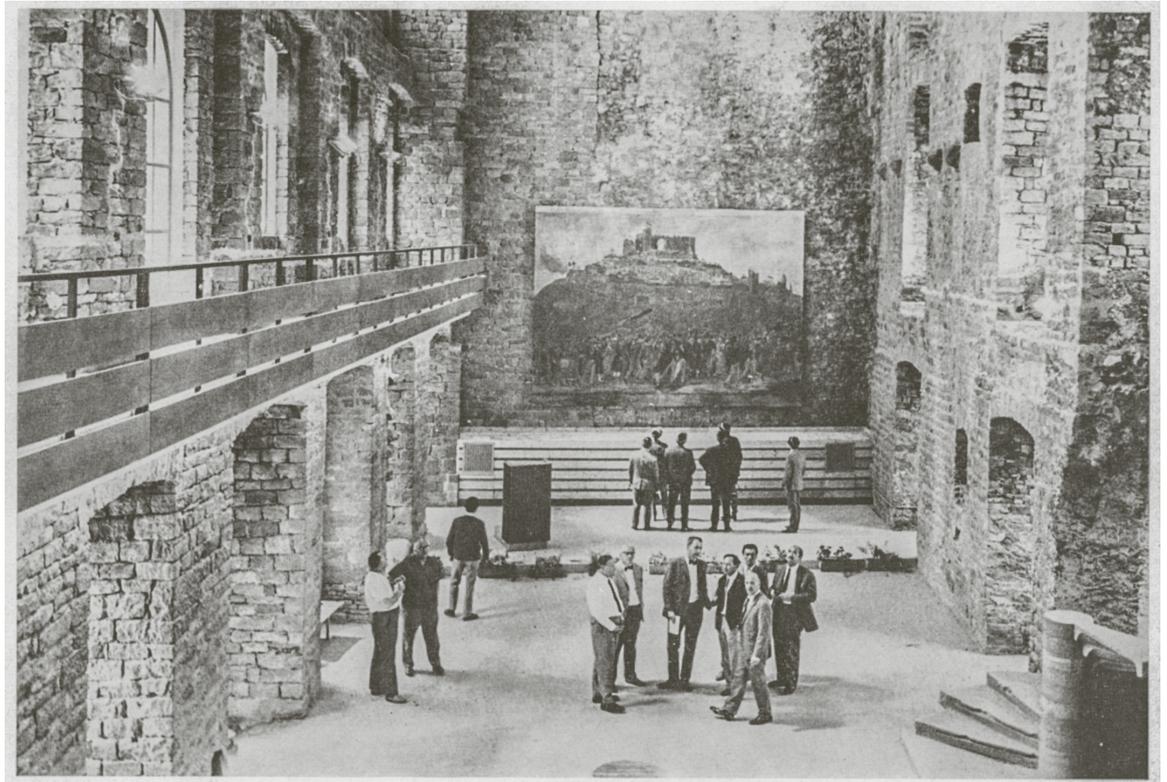


Fig. 3: Hambach Castle's banquet hall (1969).

and fitted with windows and a heating system, enabling events to be held regardless of the weather. At that time, Hambach Castle was still a “disregarded cradle of the history of democracy.”³²

Contemporary Reconstructions

On the occasion of the 150th anniversary celebrations in 1982, extensive renovation and expansion measures were initiated after the public had been asked for their opinion and general approval seemed to be secured. Whatever the public, like the experts of the time, understood by a reconstruction that was as “true to the original as possible”.³³

The conditions and procedures were the same as at the start of the construction work on the Maxburg, 136 years earlier: Before reconstruction could begin, extensive areas had to be cleaned and dismantled. This was followed by extensive refurbishment of the façades and strengthening of the masonry, with the district of Bad Dürkheim (to which Neustadt belonged at the time) assuming the role of building owner. In the entrance area in particular, the remnants of various demolitions and cancelled renovation measures were left as untouched as possible. The ballroom was redesigned on the basis of conservation considerations, which also included the removal of a gallery installed in the 1960s.³⁴ Fig. 3 shows representatives of the state monument conservation authorities inspecting the room during the 1960s, with the iconic painting (depicting the 1832 Festival-goers ascending the hill to the castle, see Fig. 1) still hanging on the wall.

In keeping with the taste of the time, the interior was largely finished in wood and wrought iron, with wooden beams being specially procured from the Black Forest.³⁵ In 1982, 150 years after the Hambach Festival, the work was completed. The German flag fluttered on the keep, and the flags of the village, town, and country stood guard for the festival guests.

Political Utilisation

As Theodor Heuss³⁶ noted in 1932 at the 100th anniversary of the Hambach Festival: “There have been times when the celebrants only wanted to feel the national German élan, others when all memory gathered around the catalogue of bourgeois freedoms, others who found the undertone of social revolutionary currents as the new and future right of that movement.”

On the occasion of the anniversary celebrations in 1982, Minister President Bernhard Vogel of the Rhineland-Palatinate ruling Christian Democrats gave a speech. Representatives of the social-liberal federal government, on the other hand, were not involved.³⁷ The Greens presented three memorials: a stone for Hiroshima, a tree of life, and the symbol of swords to ploughshares.³⁸ The processions were led by numerous honourable citizens wearing black, red, and gold sashes. A larger number of hippies – the great countercultural youth movement – also took part in the event, often bare-chested. All in all, countless citizens of all ages and of different social backgrounds took part in the 1982 festival. But without good food and plenty of wine, the festival in the Palatinate would not be conceivable – as pictures of the banquet show.³⁹

When US President Ronald Reagan was invited by Chancellor Helmut Kohl of the Christian Democratic Party to visit Hambach Castle in 1985, the harmony was over: Saarland Minister President Oskar Lafontaine of the Social Democratic Party organised a counter-demonstration on Neustadt’s market square, termed a celebration for peace.⁴⁰

After a quarter of a century, remodelling work was due to start again in 2006, mainly affecting the technical building systems. A competition was held for renovation, conversion, and modernisation of the building, which was won by the architect Max Dudler. The ballroom ceiling was replaced, the lighting renewed, and the fire suppression systems brought up to date.

The most visible change was the adaptation of a restaurant on the edge of the plateau. What should it have been called, if not “1832”? But nowhere in Dudler’s descriptions is any reference to ‘democratic building’.⁴¹ The interventions and extensions were honoured with the German Architecture Prize in 2013.⁴²

Continuous maintenance and careful modernisation should be an unavoidable process that must be financed accordingly.⁴³ The castle’s banqueting hall is therefore often used for celebrations, honours, and awards or other official occasions by the district council, local and regional politicians, and even the police and armed forces.⁴⁴

Historical and Contemporary Claims

The Hambach Castle now stands, large and imposing, with the black, red, and gold flag on its tower. It has been used to serve, for example, as the lead

story for the Christian Democratic Union's flyer in the state election campaign. This party would perhaps refer to Konrad Adenauer, the first Chancellor of the Federal Republic of Germany, and the prize named after him, which was awarded at the castle in 1970.⁴⁵

The liberals go further back, emphasising that their own kind had led the Hambach Festival.⁴⁶ No, the Social Democrats will answer: It was the workers and farmers who made up the largest section of the 30,000 protesters. Even the textbooks from the German Democratic Republic contained positive reflections, seeking to commemorate the brush-maker Johann Philipp Becker, a participant in the Hambach Festival and a friend of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels.

That remains our foundation today: The achievement of social justice, peace among nations, and international solidarity will complement the Left. Yes, internationalisation is an important aspect, as Switzerland can confirm. Without the group of Swiss citizens who advised the Palatinate freedom fighters on questions of grassroots democratic decision-making processes, the Hambach Festival could not have been so successful. In contrast, Germany's western neighbour will claim that the basis was – without question – the French Revolution of 1789.

Furthermore, the contribution of Polish officers and soldiers should not be overlooked. Without their exemplary courage in the fight for Polish autonomy, the wave of enthusiasm in Hambach would not have materialised. But there is still an ecological aspect, since (as the Greens would point out) winegrowers were already struggling with fluctuating climatic conditions back then.

The LGBTQ community might focus on the fact that women were deliberately involved in the discussion process, which meant that gender categorisation took a back seat for the first time.

There are still the eternally *yesterday's people*, who lie about the blue in the sky, propagate a *New Hambach Festival*, and want to introduce a different democracy.⁴⁷ They run up to the castle with a roar and carry the flag in its earlier inverted form.⁴⁸ To avoid misunderstanding, the recent *Playmobil* diorama felt obliged to revert from that historical flag to the Federal Republic's present-day orientation (black, red, and gold).

Finally, Hambach has significance even for the tourism sector: from their perspective, the Hambach Festival was the first international, extremely suc-

cessful promotion of Palatinate wine! This potential is utilised today by creating awareness through signage on motorways, and diverse products (ranging from baked goods to deckchairs) displaying the year 1832. Furthermore, a well-known real estate manager – not wishing to be excluded – painted the entire façade of a prominent building in Neustadt city centre to depict a child swinging over Hambach Castle.

Even today, you can't miss the castle. Countless signs and information boards indicate the way up the hill. On festival days, flags are hung, women in historicising costumes hand out flyers, and bread and wine are served under temporary marquees. The motto of 2024 was „*Wine and Democracy*“ (not the other way around!).⁴⁹ In addition, the group *Friends of Hambach Festival 1832* was honoured by the *Federal Agency for Civic Education* in the „*Active for Democracy and Tolerance*“ competition of December 2024.⁵⁰

You could relax, eat, and drink while gazing at Hambach Castle. Chilled drinks were served from large glasses dating from the 175th anniversary.⁵¹ The castle, the flags, and the slogan were not to be missed: Unity and freedom for Germany and Europe! Sitting on a black, red, and gold bench, one may ponder how everything is connected to everything else in the history of European democracy.

It is therefore not surprising that Hambach Castle has been awarded the *European Heritage Label*. Europe begins here, says the plaque – making the castle a symbol of the struggle for civil liberties in Europe, says the short description. Right here at Hambach Castle; right here at Hambach in the middle of the European Union.

End and Thanks

In addition to the work on the general historical background and regional history, the research for this article also included contemporary sources on the reconstruction measures of the 1960s, 1980s, and 2000s. This was supplemented by a study of mostly current local newspaper articles.

Our insights into the current factual situation and mood as well as the monument worthiness and interpretive sovereignty of Hambach Castle were deepened through conversations with scientifically engaged or politically committed respondents.

First of all, special thanks are due to Dr. Kristian Buchna, a research assistant at the Hambach Castle Foundation⁵² since 2020, who took time for an intensive exchange in August 2024. The authors



Fig. 4: Hambach Castle and the “1832” Restaurant (2013).

would also like to thank Ruth Ratter, former member (Bündnis 90/Die Grünen) of the Rhineland-Palatinate State Parliament, who has been intensively involved for several years in the field of remembrance and remembrance work in the Palatinate district parliament that is close to her heart, and who had a personal conversation with the two authors in September 2024.

The diverse assessments of the appropriations were supplemented by personal memories from Achim Schulze⁵³ (local SPD chairman, Deidesheim), and feedback from Isabel Mackensen-Geis, who has represented the SPD in the German Bundestag since 2019.

The aforementioned exchanges made it clear that the intangible heritage of the Hambach Festival is clearly in the foreground for today’s actors. To build on this in a contemporary way is the task of all democratic forces. There was also agreement that the actions of populist groups should be viewed critically, and require a defensive public.

For all respondents (as well as for the architects involved in recent decades), the material heritage of Hambach Castle – in the understanding of the genuine, original, or authentic – receded into the background.

Figures

- 1 Verlag u. Druckerei D. Meininger GmbH (Ed.), *Die Pfalz am Rhein*, Neustadt a. d. W., 1982, p. 189.
- 2 Hiltrud Funk and Gerhard Hofmann, *Die malerische und romantische Pfalz*, Museum der Stadt Neustadt a. d. W. 2024, p. 33.
- 3 Landratsamt Neustadt a. d. W. (Ed.), *Hambacher Schloß, Ein Denkmal der deutschen Demokratie, Beiträge zur Erneuerung des Hambacher Schlosses*, Neustadt / Weinstraße 1969, p. 159.
- 4 Archives Birgit Franz and Georg Maybaum

Endnotes

- 1 Located in present day Neustadt an der Weinstraße, Rhineland-Palatinate, southwest Germany.
- 2 Karl Moersch, *Geschichte der Pfalz, Von den Anfängen bis ins 19. Jahrhundert*, Landau 1987, p. 474–483.
- 3 Thomas Handrich, *Erinnerungsorte der Geschichte der Demokratie, Auf den Spuren der Demokratiebewegung in Rhein Hessen und der Pfalz (1789-1849)*, Oppenheim am Rhein 2024, p. 51–54, p. 132–140.
- 4 Wilhelm Fensterer, *Der ‚gantze Landrath‘ zog mit hinauf zum Schloss*, in: Anon, *Die Pfalz am Rhein, Mitteilungen des Bezirksverbandes Pfalz, Festaussgabe: 150 Jahre Hambacher Fest*, Mai 1982, No. 3, 55th volume, Neustadt 1982, p. 207–212.
- 5 Stiftung Hambacher Schloss, *Hambach Castle: Discover History, Experience Culture, Strengthen Democracy* (double-sided printed flyer); Conversation with Kristian Buchna (29 August 2024): Wirth’s mention of two participants from Manchester is credible, but has not been substantiated to date: Johann Georg August Wirth, *Das Nationalfest der Deutschen zu Hambach*, Neustadt a. H. 1832 (reprint 1981), p. 14.
- 6 Watercolour of the Hambach Festival on 27 May 1832, <https://www.bpb.de/kurz-knapp/hintergrund-aktuell/508682/vor-190-jahren-hambacher-fest/> (© picture-alliance, akg-images) (29 January 2025).
- 7 Nahuel Vollmer, *Polnische Fahnen beim Hambacher Fest [Palatinate Revolution: Polish Flags at the Hambach Festival]*, in: *Die Rheinpfalz* (25 October 2024).
- 8 Neues Exponat: *Playmobil-Festzug hält Einzug im Hambacher Schloss*, in: *Pfalz-Express* (18 March 2015), <https://www.pfalz-express.de/neues-exponat-playmobil-festzug-halt-einzug-im-hambacher-schloss/> (29 January 2025).
- 9 One of the two flags is said to have been in the attic of Palais Schaumburg, the former seat of the Federal Chancellery, during Konrad Adenauer’s time. Conversation with Kristian Buchna (29 August 2024).
- 10 The associated exhibition was recently updated and expanded in terms of media. *Die Rheinpfalz* (19 August 2024), *Animierte Geschichte*.
- 11 Here, ‘Germany’ refers to the ideal image of a united nation: J. W. Wirth 1832 (See note 5) calls the events of 1832 ‘*The National Festival of the Germans*’ and begins his book with the word ‘*Deutschland...*’.
- 12 Then as now, 38 states were named, although Hesse-Homburg was already admitted as the 39th state in 1817.
- 13 The following are named as speakers: Philipp Hepp (Neustadt), Philipp Jakob Siebenpfeiffer (Rheinbaiern), Johann Georg August Wirth (Rheinbaiern), Lucien Ray (Strasbourg), Nikolaus Hallauer (Lichtenberg), Carl Theodor Barth (Lauterecken), Karl Heinrich Brüggemann (Prussia), Friedrich Deidesheimer (Neustadt); Johann Philipp Becker (Frankenthal), Eduard Müller (Mainz), Ludwig Frey (Neustadt), Gottfried Widmann (Würzburg), Franz Joseph Stromeyer (Mannheim), Friedrich Schüler (Saarbrücken) and Johann Jakob Schoppmann (Neustadt) as well as Franz Grzymala, Oranski and Zatwarnicky from Poland.
- 14 Wirth 1832 (See note 5), p. 48.
- 15 Klaus-Peter Westrich, *Neustadt und die Polenhilfe um 1832*, in: Anon 1982 (See note 4), p. 237–239, <https://rpb.lobid.org/107t01150954>.
- 16 Alfred Mechtersheimer, *Das Hambacher Fest und die Friedensbewegung*, in: Anon 1982 (See note 4), p. 157–158, <https://rpb.lobid.org/107t120431>.
- 17 Landratsamt Neustadt a.d.W. (Ed.), *Hambacher Schloß, Ein Denkmal der deutschen Demokratie, Beiträge zur Erneuerung des Hambacher Schlosses 1968/69*, Neustadt/Weinstraße 1969, p. 7.
- 18 Rudolf Lembcke, *Hambacher Schloß und Hambacher Fest – Bilder aus der Geschichte einer Traditionsstätte der deutschen Demokratie*, in: *Ibid.*, p. 15.
- 19 Karl Heinz, *Das Hambacher Schloß, Geschichte, Bauperioden, Hambacher Feste*, Neustadt a.d.W. 1982, p. 110.
- 20 *Ibid.*, p. 113.
- 21 The German Federal Convention was the only central decision-making institution of the German Confederation.
- 22 Anke Herbert, *Hambacher Fest lässt grüßen, Es war ein Tag, an dem Philipp Jakob Siebenpfeiffer, einer der Protagonisten des Fests von 1832, stolz auf Neustadt gewesen wäre. Tausende sind aufgestanden, um eine wehrhafte Demokratie unter Beweis zu stellen*. in: *Die Rheinpfalz* (29 January 2024).
- 23 Maximilian II. Joseph of Bavaria (* 28 November 1811 in Munich; † 10 March 1864 in Munich) of the Wittelsbach dynasty was King of Bavaria from 1848 to 1864. His marriage to Marie Friederike of Prussia produced Kings Ludwig II and Otto I of Bavaria.
- 24 Maximilian II’s father, Ludwig I (* 25 August 1786 in Strasbourg; † 29 February 1868 in Nice), was King of Bavaria from 1825 to 1848.
- 25 The term ‘Maxburg’ for Hambach Castle was first used by the former mayor of Mannheim, Valentin Möhl in the 1840s: Heinz 1982 (See note 19), p. 166.
- 26 Landratsamt Neustadt a.d.W. (see note 17), Figs. 16–18 and 26–28.
- 27 Ernst Gall describes these conversions as „*severely impairing the historical building stock*“, in: Georg Dehio, newly edited by Ernst Gall, *Handbuch der Deutschen Kunstdenkmäler, Pfalz und Rhein Hessen*, München/Berlin 1951, p. 235–236.
- 28 Anon 1982 (See note 4), p. 275.

- 29 *Illustrierte Zeitung* (22 June 1872), *40 Jährige Gedenkfeier des Hambacher Festes*, https://static.demokratiegeschichte.eu/fileadmin/user_upload/hambacher_fest/ZeitungsberichtJubilaum1872.jpg (20 January 2025).
- 30 Anon 1982 (See note 4), p. 276, p. 278.
- 31 Poster: *100 Jahr-Feier des Hambacher Festes von 1832*. https://static.demokratiegeschichte.eu/fileadmin/user_upload/hambacher_fest/PlakatJubilaum1932.jpg (20 January 2025).
- 32 Conversation with Kristian Buchna (29 August 2024).
- 33 Heinz 1982 (see note 19), p. 16.
- 34 *Ibid.*, p. 11 ff.
- 35 At that time, the clients, planners, and contractors were proud to have also used 175,000 kg of cement.
- 36 Theodor Heuss, first President of the Federal Republic of Germany (1949–1959), in: Wirth 1832/1981 (See note 5), preface, chapter I.
- 37 In the accompanying interview, Vogel refers to the difference between the legitimised representatives, including himself, and the other groups, who only speak for themselves, in: Heinz 1982 (See note 19), p. 59.
- 38 Heinz 1982 (See note 19), p. 62.
- 39 *Ibid.*, p. 38.
- 40 SPD-Bezirk Pfalz and Jusos Rheinland-Pfalz, *Ein Fest für den Frieden, 153 Jahre Hambacher Fest, Unsere Botschaft an Reagan*, Neustadt a.d.W. 1985, p. 64.
- 41 Max Dudler, *Umbau und Neubau Hambacher Schloss*, undated, p. 1–10; In the folder accompanying the Hambach Castle Foundation's press release on the ground-breaking ceremony on 26 March 2013 is at least talk of “*immaterial identity*”.
- 42 Wolfgang Bachmann (Ed.), *Rebuilding in the Palatinate – Using Built Spaces, Reviving Places, Saving Resources*, Munich 2022.
- 43 Die Rheinpfalz (16 March 2024), *150.000 Euro Förderung für das Hambacher Schloss (Federal Programme „Investments in Nationally Significant Cultural Institutions“)*.
- 44 Die Rheinpfalz (7 September 2024), *Das hauptberufliche Ehrenamt* (district council/Bezirkstag); Rheinpfalz (2 August 2024), *Abschied am ‚Gipfel der Demokratie‘* (Police); Rheinpfalz (18 May 2024), *Stadtrat bekundet Entschlossenheit* (Meeting of the City Council with a contribution from Kristian Buchna); Rheinpfalz (23 March 2024), *Da kann man eben doch was machen* (Honouring the German–American author Nora Krug (‘*Belonging*’ from 2018) with the Gerty Spies Literature Prize of the State Agency for Civic Education; Rheinpfalz (13 March 2024), *Preisträger gekürt. Neustädter Verein erhält Abresch-Preis – Freiheitspreis für russische Aktivistin* (Honouring Irina Scherbakowa).
- 45 Konrad Adenauer Prize, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Konrad_Adenauer_Prize (20 January 2025).
- 46 FDP, Election advertising, undated, *Unser Deutschland soll ein Land der Freiheit und Chancen sein*.
- 47 Kristian Buchna commented that he sometimes had the impression that Hambach was “*the most contested place in the history of democracy in Germany*.” (conversation on 29 August 2024); Kristian Buchna, *Versammlungen am Hambacher Schloss, Kein anderer Demokratieort in Deutschland ist ähnlich umkämpft. in: DÜW-Journal* (2024), Vol. 01, p. 19, <https://rpb.lobid.org/107t240976>.
- 48 Die Rheinpfalz (26 February 2024): *Politische Wölfe in Schafspelzen*; Rheinpfalz (15 May 2024): *Dass alles friedlich und gewaltfrei bleibt*; Rheinpfalz (10 December 2024), *Sind 15 Trommler angemessen?*
- 49 Die Rheinpfalz (11 June 2024): *Wein und Demokratie, Fest Schwarz-Rot-Gold am Wochenende in Hambach*, (9 March 2024): *Gemeinsam für die Demokratie*.
- 50 Die Rheinpfalz (13 December 2024): *Einsatz für Demokratie mit Preis gewürdigt*.
- 51 Former Federal President Richard von Weizsäcker and Minister-President Kurt Beck (SPD) spoke at the 175th anniversary event, as documented by two differently illustrated versions of the special supplement in the regional newspaper: Rheinpfalz (26 May 2007) with a picture of Weizäcker, and Rheinpfalz (27 May 2007) with a picture of Beck.
- 52 Since 2002 the castle is owned by the foundation Stiftung Hambacher Schloss, established and financed by the state of Rhineland-Palatinate, the district of Bad Dürkheim, the District Association of the Palatinate, and the town of Neustadt.
- 53 Achim Schulze was one of the demonstrators against the awarding of the Konrad Adenauer Prize in 1970 (See note 45) and during Ronald Reagan's visit in 1985 (See note 40).



**HERITAGE
AND
POLITY**

Daring More Democracy?

Practices in Urban Heritage Conservation and their Underlying Notions of Democracy in West Germany and North-Rhine Westphalia in the 1970s and '80s

LISA MARIE SELITZ

ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

Demokratisierung wurde insbesondere in den 1970er Jahren als Aufgabe der deutschsprachigen Denkmalpflege diskutiert. Zeitgleich wurden durch weitreichende Reformen im Bereich der Stadtplanung Instrumente zur Demokratisierung von Planungsprozessen und zur Partizipation eingeführt und kodifiziert. Dieser Artikel zeichnet die Verflechtungen von Politik, Forschung, Recht und Verwaltung zu Vorstellungen von Demokratisierung und städtebaulicher Denkmalpflege in der ehemaligen Bundesrepublik Deutschland, insbesondere Nordrhein-Westfalen (NRW), nach. Der zeitliche Fokus liegt auf die für die Disziplin prägende Periode der späten 1960er Jahren bis zum Inkrafttreten des nordrhein-westfälischen Denkmalschutzgesetzes 1980. Am Beispiel des Engagements für den Erhalt der Arbeitersiedlung Eisenheim wird erörtert, wie Fragen von Klasse, gesellschaftlicher Repräsentation, Methodik und Anwaltschaft in die städtebauliche Denkmalpflege eingeführt wurden. Zudem wird aufgezeigt, wie die regulatorischen Rahmenbedingungen von Stadtplanung und städtebaulicher Denkmalpflege sich in NRW entwickelten – und wo der gesetzliche Rahmen des Denkmalschutzes letztlich hinter den Erwartungen zurückblieb.

Dieser Artikel verdeutlicht die seit den frühen 1970er Jahren bestehende theoretische und praktische Basis der städtebaulichen Denkmalpflege. Obwohl dieser Aspekt bislang kaum systematisch aufgearbeitet wurde, ist eine kritische Auseinandersetzung mit diesen Ursprüngen der Disziplin sinnvoll, um aktuelle Debatten zu gesellschaftlicher Repräsentation, normativen Leitlinien, Inwertsetzung und Governance in der Denkmalpflege zu reflektieren – insbesondere vor dem Hintergrund, dass die Bedeutung von urbanem Erbe und Partizipation für eine demokratische Gesellschaft aktuell wieder ins Bewusstsein der Disziplin gerufen werden.

ABSTRACT

Democratisation emerged as a key theme in the discourse on heritage conservation in the former West Germany during the 1970s. This development aligned with urban planning reforms, which introduced and codified tools for the democratisation of planning processes. This article traces and exemplifies the interconnections among notions of democratisation in policy, research, law and administration, and urban heritage conservation. It focuses on West Germany and the state of North Rhine-Westphalia (NRW) during the formative period from the late 1960s up to the enactment of the Heritage Protection Act NRW of 1980.

By examining contemporary literature, legal documents, and key events, the article traces the evolution of the discipline of urban heritage conservation and its links to broader political and societal conditions and transformations. Taking the fight for the preservation of the 1840s workers' settlement Eisenheim in NRW as an example, it highlights how issues of class, identity, representation, methodology, and advocacy were introduced in urban heritage conservation. Furthermore, it critically assesses how the regulatory framework of urban planning and heritage conservation in NRW evolved in relation to participatory processes and democratic ideals – and where it subsequently fell short.

The article argues that urban heritage conservation in West Germany established a theoretical and practical foundation that was laid in the early 1970s and that reflected contemporary movements towards participation and the increasing integration of planning processes themselves. It is prudent to revisit and critically engage with the field's origin in order to navigate contemporary questions of representation, policy, values, and governance – especially as the importance of urban heritage and participation for a democratic society is being reinvoked.

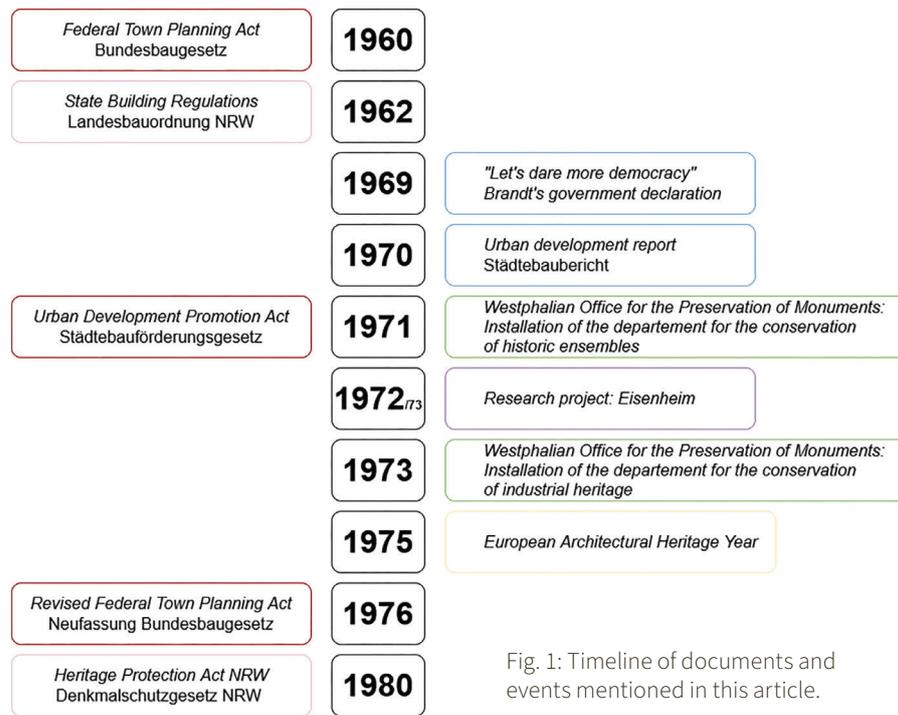


Fig. 1: Timeline of documents and events mentioned in this article.

Urban Heritage in Context

Since urban heritage is a fluid and complex concept to safeguard, the negotiation processes and balancing of interests within urban development efforts become critically important. These practices are deeply shaped by the evolving legal and practical frameworks that accumulate over time, influenced by diverse spatial, societal, and political contexts. This article focuses on urban heritage conservation in the former West Germany, especially during its formative period of the 1970s, and its connection to democratic ideals.

For the purposes of this article, I define urban heritage conservation as encompassing all activities that are designed to function systematically and proactively within a planning context and that work towards the conservation of cohesive urban spaces and settlements to which historical significance is attributed. I intentionally chose a definition that is independent of the actors involved, as I discuss the roles of politicians, researchers, civil society activists, as well as institutions and authorities.

As a vantage point for this discussion, I have chosen Willy Brandt's iconic statement: *"Wir wollen mehr Demokratie wagen"* (Let's dare more democracy).¹ In his 1969 government declaration as the first Social Democratic chancellor of the Federal Republic of Germany, Brandt advocated for a governance approach that fostered greater participation. His words resonated in contemporary debates on urban renewal. During this same period, urban heritage

conservation emerged as a growing public concern, with its momentum peaking in the European Architectural Heritage Year of 1975.

Building on that, I will explore how democratic principles were embedded in the early debates on urban redevelopment and urban heritage conservation in the former West Germany. To illustrate these points, I will focus on the context of the western state of North Rhine-Westphalia (NRW) and its urban industrial heritage, as the state's cultural sovereignty itself serves as a tool of defensive democracy. I will also provide an overview of how the legal framework for heritage protection, established in NRW in the 1980s, evolved in relation to concepts of democracy and urban heritage conservation. Lastly, I will address how the idea of urban heritage as a democratic tool is being reintegrated into contemporary professional discourses.

Urban Redevelopment and Social Policy

During Willy Brandt's term of office, several groundbreaking measures were introduced that would shape urban planning in West Germany both practically and theoretically. One of the most significant regulatory tools was the *Städtebauförderungsgesetz* (Urban Development Promotion Act),² a law aimed at promoting urban development in designated areas; the Act came into effect in 1971, although its groundwork had been laid in the mid-1960s (for an overview of documents and events mentioned in this article, see Fig. 1).

Due to the rapid pace of urban change – stemming both from the aftermath of the Second World War and the far-reaching, technocratic practices of land redevelopment (*Flächensanierung*) – a new regulatory mechanism was needed to guide redevelopment by means of federal and state funding. This need led to the introduction of the Urban Development Promotion Act (1971) as an addition to the existing Federal Town Planning Act (*Bundesbaugesetz*) that had been in place since 1960 and primarily focused on the control of land use.³

The Urban Development Promotion Act of 1971 introduced, for the first time, elements of citizen participation into planning law, granting affected communities the rights to information, protection, and involvement in the process.⁴ In the 1970 *Urban Development Report*, which was announced in Brandt's government declaration, the "democratisation of the planning process" was highlighted as essential for enabling "democratic civic engagement [...] where the sphere of life of each individual is most directly affected."⁵ Urban planning was to be defined and enabled to apply social policy.⁶

The goal was to promote a vision of democratisation that would foster "future-oriented, humane urban development".⁷ This was groundbreaking because it meant that the needs of residents could no longer be separated from the processes of urban redevelopment. For the first time, the social costs of unchecked development – particularly for lower-income groups – began to be acknowledged. However, it is important to note that the progressive rhetoric

did not necessarily align with reality when it came to mitigating these costs.

Lauritz Lauritzen, a Social Democrat politician appointed Federal Minister for Building under both Chancellor Brandt and his predecessor Kurt Georg Kiesinger (*Christian Democratic Union of Germany*), embraced Brandt's call to "dare more democracy". In 1972, he published a collection of essays titled *Mehr Demokratie im Städtebau* (More Democracy in Urban Development), featuring contemporary concepts from the United States that promoted public participation.⁸ Among these were Sherry Arnstein's influential *ladder of participation* (1969) and Paul Davidoff's concept of *advocacy planning* (1965).

Advocacy planning, also referenced in the 1970 *Urban Development Report* as a potential tool for democratising planning processes, seeks to provide expert support to those affected by planning – especially low-income families and marginalised communities, who may be unaware of how planning decisions impact them or lack the means to participate in decision-making processes. This approach aims to strengthen the representation of these groups, ensuring their needs and values are considered, thereby facilitating more pluralistic and democratic planning processes.

Davidoff, like Arnstein, took an activist's stance to urban redevelopment and promoted citizen involvement – as did German-speaking scholars such as: Lucius Burkhardt, who also discusses advocacy planning and urban heritage conservation in *Who Plans the Planning*;⁹ Kristiana Hartmann and Franziska Bollerey, who connected the social plan – called for by the Urban Development Promotion Act – to urban heritage conservation;¹⁰ and Roland Günter.

University Involvement, Industrial Heritage, and Activism

In NRW, Roland Günter was one of the most influential researchers and activists within the field of urban rehabilitation and urban preservation. His career in heritage conservation began in the mid-1960s at the *Rhenish Office for the Preservation of Monuments*, where he was responsible for compiling lists of monuments in industrial cities across the Ruhr district, including Oberhausen. In his position, he pushed the contemporary boundaries of what was considered to be of heritage value, as he included the remains of industrial history.¹¹ Subsequently, as a professor of visual communication at the *University of Applied Sciences* in Bielefeld, Günter led a



Fig. 2: The Eisenheim workers' settlement. Werrastraße, seen from the southeast. Each building was designed for four parties (1/25/2025).

research project (1972–1973) involving 23 students, to document Eisenheim, an early (mid-19th century) workers' settlement or company town in Oberhausen that faced long-standing and acute threat of demolition for a proposed high-rise development.¹²

Initially focused on documentation, the project soon evolved into an activist effort for preservation, as Günter and his team forged strong ties with the local residents. According to the project report, one of their key objectives became making Eisenheim the best-known workers' settlement in Germany. The team employed a wide range of methodological approaches, which included not only analysing the historical and social significance of the settlement but also incorporated oral and visual history, as well as the newly developed method of *communication analysis* that focussed on the observation of social interactions within the urban space.¹³ They extensively utilised various media and engaged with professional networks to amplify their efforts. Their approach was successful, as Eisenheim became a prime example of how activism and urban heritage conservation worked together to preserve a living urban environment (see Figs. 1 and 2).

Günter has long been an advocate of the belief that the built environment significantly influences communal living, communication, and the development of communities. Class, and the representation of lower-income populations, were central themes in both this project and Günter's teachings. Another of the project's goals, for example, reads: "Wir engagieren uns für Leute, die übers Ohr gehauen werden." (We are committed to helping people who are being ripped off.).¹⁴ Günter and his *Project Group Eisenheim* actively promoted solidarity, emancipation, and organised resistance through civic action groups, grounded in the historical and social significance of the settlement.¹⁵ For Günter, the protection of monuments was inseparable from the protection of the social context, or *milieu*.¹⁶

In 1972, Eisenheim was declared a monument by the Rhenish State Conservator. For Günter, heritage, the right to historical and cultural representation for all, and political action were deeply interconnected. He believed that the role of the conservator should extend beyond preserving physical monuments to also advocating for the gradually established social structures within them – as an ombudsman.¹⁷

Between 1973 and 1974, Günter presented the case study of Eisenheim within the research group on sociocultural conditions of the social plan at the Cen-

tre for Interdisciplinary Studies, *University of Bielefeld*.¹⁸ A social plan was required by the Urban Development Promotion Act as a tool to assess the social impact of redevelopment. As an informal planning tool, it was not legally binding. Two notable members of the research group were Franziska Bollerey and Kristiana Hartmann.¹⁹ Within the research group, Bollerey and Hartmann connected the social plan to the social impact of the built urban environment and to the work of heritage conservators – whom they demanded should reprioritise their duties to: Deprioritise the care for individual monuments, and instead reprioritise early and thorough involvement in urban planning processes while engaging with civic activist groups. Both researchers undertook doctorates that focused on the connection between urban planning since industrialisation and their connection to social reform.²⁰ Both also conducted extensive surveys on workers' settlements in the industrial Ruhr district, their social as well as historic values, and how to preserve and rehabilitate them.²¹ At the time, it was hoped that social and heritage-related concerns together could carry enough political weight to counterbalance economic interests.

Hartmann and Bollerey were present at the 12th Art Historians' Conference in 1970, where proposals for reforming the preservation of monuments were presented – moderated by Günter – at the general meeting. Among other things, it was stated that heritage conservation is a political task, and that heritage conservation at that time could only be seen in the context of urban development.²² As oil replaced



Fig. 3: Characteristic footpath (parallel to the main routes of the settlement, here Eisenheimstraße) located behind the main buildings, leading to outbuildings and kitchen gardens (1/25/2025).

the need for black coal, a profound structural change began in the industrial Ruhr district, accompanied by a Social Democratic state government, that lasted continuously between 1966 and 2005.²³

The Legal Framework of the State's Conservators

While the activist researchers tried to nudge institutionalised heritage conservators to consider more democracy and citizens' participation and to become actively involved, the offices for the preservation of monuments in NRW worked to establish their own role in planning processes.

At that time, their legal basis still dated back to the pre-democratic Prussian times of 1844²⁴ and 1891.²⁵ Their mandate under this basis was mainly limited to publicly owned buildings.²⁶ Since there was not yet a modern law for heritage protection, both state offices in NRW relied on other legal contexts to address their concerns. As public authorities, they leveraged their right to participate in urban planning under the Federal Town Planning Act.²⁷ This started the institutionalisation of urban heritage conservation in NRW. Their involvement in urban land-use planning (*Bauleitplanung*) allowed them to challenge plans that would affect or impair monuments and to identify objects and zones of interest for heritage conservation. These zones of interest were focused on the areas surrounding exceptional monuments such as churches and castles; or on areas with a high density of monuments, such as historic town centres – especially those threatened by urban redevelopment. Beginning in 1962, state building regulations (*Landesbauordnung*) prohibited the impairment of monuments and areas of historical, artistic, or urban development significance.²⁸ When local bylaws were established regarding design requirements (*Gestaltungssatzungen*) or (since 1976) on the preservation of areas designated for their significance to urban development (*Erhaltungssatzungen*), the states' conservators were to be involved.

Between the late 1960s and the implementation of the new Heritage Protection Act of NRW in 1980, the state offices developed various systematic approaches to maximise their impact despite having relatively limited staff and resources. These efforts are evident in the archive of the *Westphalian Office for the Preservation of Monuments*, including using form sheets, drawing directly into plans and returning them to the municipalities, listing evidently deteriorated ensembles and town centres, and providing statements and expert reports.²⁹

In 1971 Westphalia established a department dedicated to the conservation of historic ensembles, and then in 1973 for the conservation of industrial heritage. These new areas of focus reflected the expanding concept of what was considered worthy of protection as heritage. The discussed importance of urban development, folklore (or class), and technical advancements in the labour sector for heritage protection, along with the ongoing debate about the significance of what is now referred to as the historic urban landscape, were also reflected in the state government's new legislation.

Democratic Elements Within the Heritage Protection Act (NRW) of 1980

It was said that Dietrich Ellger, the state conservator of Westphalia-Lippe at that time, initially had a reserved attitude towards the Heritage Protection Act of 1980, as the state government was keen to find a solution that was as *democratic as possible*.³⁰ The legal changes gave local authorities more power over monument protection.³¹ With the new legal framework, nearly 400 municipalities in NRW became their own authorities on monument protection. This decentralisation and transmission of decision-making powers from the two state offices to the municipalities aimed to bring decision makers closer to the objects of preservation, also encouraging greater citizen involvement.³² The former state authorities were restructured into advisory institutions. Nevertheless, the law as well as the diverse expertise concentrated at these institutions ensured that they were systematically involved in all decisions related to heritage protection.

With the new legal framework, monuments were to be constitutively listed and therefore their conservation status made legally binding for the convenience of citizens. Local councils were tasked with establishing monument committees to communicate heritage issues to both politicians and the public. Volunteers with expertise in heritage conservation were designated as local advocates and oversight bodies, acting as multipliers to disseminate knowledge and ensure accountability. Local heritage statutes were introduced that provided for a new legal framework for the protection of entire areas, while an informal communal heritage plan for municipalities was to align the interests of urban heritage conservation with broader urban development goals on a local level. The municipalities gained pre-emption rights for monuments (suspended in 1998, reintroduced in 2022) and it was clarified that the Urban Develop-

ment Promotion Act could be used to fund heritage protection with the involvement of the offices for the preservation of monuments. Additionally, a state council for the conservation of monuments was to be established to provide guidance on urgent matters.

And Now

In my work as a scientific advisor for urban heritage conservation at the successor institution of the office for preservation of monuments in Westphalia-Lippe, I frequently encounter traces of these discussions that were introduced in the 1970s but unfortunately never fully lived up to their potential.

Monument committees in local councils occasionally hold votes on whether to list a monument, attempting to enforce their understanding of their political role, despite not having the legal right to do so when the object in question meets the legal criteria to be listed as determined by experts.³³ One of these criteria – besides, among others, the significance for the conditions of work and production (*Bedeutung für Arbeits- und Produktionsverhältnisse*) that was aimed at industrial heritage – is the folkloristic heritage value (*volkskundlicher Erhaltungsgrund*). This category of heritage values, according to legal commentaries, still applies exclusively to the cultural heritage of the so-called “lower and middle class”³⁴ – an allocation that is now viewed critically, following significant advancements in the field of cultural anthropology. I also regularly encounter town plans that still designate heritage areas and zones of interest identified in the 1970s, despite these areas no longer having a proper legal basis because they were not converted to local statutes. Local bylaws and statutes are often outdated, and cities in Germany generally lack the necessary tools to effectively enforce urban conservation and design standards when there is no binding status of protection. In the past 44 years, only about 5 to 7 percent of municipalities in NRW have implemented a communal heritage plan.³⁵ Of those, most are outdated, incomplete, or lack proper enforcement mechanisms. The proposed state council for the conservation of monuments, which was intended to offer guidance in urgent matters, was never established. The law never fully worked as intended; furthermore, its reform in 2022 not only partially failed to improve its applicability but also further weakened the position of the state offices. Moreover, jurisdiction and political flexibility are becoming increasingly restrictive, compounded by a lack of funding, which severely hampers effective heritage preservation. Support has waned across

large segments of the population, while social heterogeneity naturally continues to rise. The living environment is no longer primarily based on slowly evolved social and built structures – as remained prevalent in the 1970s – but must instead adapt to increasingly dynamic conditions. Other issues have become more urgent and critical – particularly the climate crisis and the preservation of democracy.

At the same time, the democratic potential of cultural heritage is now – much like during that formative period of the 1970s – recognised and discussed as a vital tool to empower and involve citizens in and for heritage conservation as well as democratic processes, possibly “where the sphere of life of each individual is most directly affected” – as Brandt phrased it in 1969.³⁶ Initiatives such as the *Faro Convention* on the value of cultural heritage for society, that aims to “empower [...] communities to take an active role in decision-making towards direct democracy”;³⁷ UNESCO’s *Recommendations on the Historic Urban Landscape*, that understands itself as “a contribution of a more open, democratic and socially sensitive toolkit for urban conservation”;³⁸ and the *Association of Critical Heritage Studies*, that seeks to democratise heritage “by consciously rejecting elite cultural narratives” [...] “embracing the heritage insights of people, communities and cultures that have traditionally been marginalised in formulation of heritage policy”³⁹ all point in this direction. Members of the *German Organisation of State Conservators* (VDL) just recently stated that Germany’s urban heritage conservation practices (*städtebauliche Denkmalpflege*) in particular offer formats for citizen participation that might be transferable to other areas of heritage conservation.⁴⁰ It is interesting to note that methods of empirical social research – that are now called for in the heritage field to expand our knowledge on what is valued as heritage, and why – were already tested in the field of urban conservation in the 1970s.

Conservation is never an end in itself; it is always connected to contemporary society and is inherently values-based. Disciplines such as urban planning and heritage conservation, which are shaped by societal values and needs, require constant recalibration as they contribute to cultural policy. And cultural policy, in turn, demands a commitment to democratic principles – whether representative, direct, deliberative, local, or participatory. Transparency, informality, deliberation, and a touch of advocacy seem like a strong foundation from which to begin this work.

Figures

1-3 Lisa Marie Selitz

Endnotes

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Approaching Controversial Monuments

Examples of Decolonisation in Bremen and Hamburg (Germany)

ACHIM TODENHÖFER

ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

Dieser Artikel stellt die öffentlichen Debatten der letzten Jahre über umstrittene Denkmäler in Bremen und Hamburg vor, die direkt oder indirekt mit dem Kolonialismus verbunden sind. Eine Reihe von Beispielen zeigt, dass sich auch in Deutschland trotz gegenläufiger Tendenzen das historische Bewusstsein für koloniale Verantwortung zugunsten der Opferperspektive verschoben hat.

Anders als in den USA oder Großbritannien wird in den beiden Hansestädten Bremen und Hamburg jedoch nicht die Existenz umstrittener Denkmäler in Frage gestellt, sondern in der Regel das Fehlen eines begleitenden Kommentars oder Kontextes thematisiert. Hier sind didaktische Ansätze zur Präsentation von Denkmälern gefragt, die im Sinne des Denkmalschutzes darauf abzielen, das kulturelle Erbe dauerhaft zu bewahren.

Insbesondere durch den Verzicht auf feste Installationen können reversible und temporäre Rekontextualisierungen – wie am Beispiel des Bismarck-Denkmal in Bremen gezeigt wird – die Perspektive für interessierte Betrachter*innen verändern und so das öffentliche Interesse aufrechterhalten, ohne die Integrität des Erbes zu beschädigen. Die im Beitrag angeführten Beispiele zeigen, dass gesellschaftliche Traumata über Denkmäler vermittelt werden, diese zur Bildung beitragen und dazu dienen können, in einer Kontroverse einen demokratischen Minimalkonsens zu entwickeln. Die These des Beitrags ist daher, dass nicht nur eine wichtige Quelle verloren geht, wenn umstrittene Denkmäler abgetragen werden oder ihres städtischen Kontextes beraubt sind, sondern auch ein Ort der direkten Auseinandersetzung verloren geht.

ABSTRACT

From the 19th century onwards, monuments were erected all over the world to symbolise history, social aspirations and values. These monuments characterized the public space of cities. Over time, however, they themselves became cultural heritage that were often overlooked, forgotten and at best perceived as curious pieces of street furniture. In some cases, they even became objects of social controversy.

This article presents the public debates of recent years, concerning controversial monuments in Bremen and Hamburg that are directly or indirectly linked to colonialism. A number of examples demonstrate that in Germany, too – despite opposing trends – historical awareness of colonial responsibility has shifted in favour of the victim perspective.

However, unlike in the United States or Great Britain, the debates in the two Hanseatic cities of Bremen and Hamburg do not question the existence of controversial monuments, but generally focus instead on the lack of accompanying commentary or context. This calls for didactic approaches to present memorial sites – which is ultimately in the spirit of monument protection – aiming to permanently preserve cultural heritage as historical sources. In particular, by dispensing with permanent installations, reversible and strictly temporary recontextualizations – such as at the Bismarck Monument in Bremen – can change the perspective for interested viewers, thereby maintaining public interest without damaging the integrity of the heritage.

It is obvious that monuments can also convey feelings and passions as cultural heritage if they are placed in the right context. The examples given here show that they can illustrate social traumas, contribute to education and serve to develop a minimum democratic consensus in a polarizing controversy. Not only is an important source lost when controversial monuments are missing or deprived of their urban context, but we also lose a place of direct debate.

Introduction

Memorials have played an important role in the culture of remembrance for nation-states since the 19th century. An inflationary number of memorials placed on squares or in other striking urban or cultural settings conveyed an educational canon for the citizenship that conformed to the ruling class.¹

Memorials frequently become overlooked and cease to be a focal point, due to their everyday nature. However, over time, memorials also gain new meanings as a result of social awareness processes and emotional projections. This aligns with the concept of relative art value from Alois Riegl's seminal work, *Der Moderne Denkmalkultus* (1903). Memorials evolve into monuments – some of which are listed as historical witnesses, as discussed in this paper.

Following the protests that began in Cape Town in 2015 with *Rhodes Must Fall* and subsequently gained global momentum, many of these urban placeholders have been the subject of criticism, particularly in democratic societies. The number of monuments that fell from their pedestals in Africa and Europe was relatively low, whereas the majority were toppled or removed in the United States. Wikipedia indicates that approximately 250 monuments and memorials were removed following the George Floyd protests.²

The purpose of this article is to examine public monuments in Bremen and Hamburg that have a connection to German colonialism and have been the focus of public criticism for some time.³

Since German reunification⁴ in 1990, there have been numerous instances of removal and damage to monuments associated with the former East German communist dictatorship, such as statues of Lenin in various locations throughout Germany's eastern states; in contrast, I am not aware of any instances of monuments in Germany being toppled following the *Black Lives Matter* movement, apart from minor damage.

The concept of decolonial aesthetics is based on the idea of reinterpreting existing ideas in order to discourage behaviours that promote violence. This involves confronting present perceptions and practices, and encouraging a shift in perspective. This is reminiscent of the performative concepts that underpin museum didactics. One of its most prominent proponents, Ariella Azoulay, a visual culture theorist, outlined her approach in her 2019 book, *Potential History. Unlearning Imperialism*: “Un-

learning means not engaging with those relegated to the ‘past’ as ‘primary sources’ but rather as potential companions.”⁵

Others, such as the architectural historian Andrew Shanken, would like to *de-dramatize the monument toppling* as such.⁶ Using the example of the toppled statue of Edward Colston in Bristol UK, they propose a social confrontation with history by re-contextualising it in a museum setting, and at the same time promote the scientification of engagement with monuments through empirical perception studies.

In this context, the concept of contested value (known as “*Streitwert*” in German), introduced by Gabriele Dolff-Bonekämper in 2010 with a view to the democratic potential of controversial monuments, can be seen as a corrective.⁷ As an inventor at the *Berlin State Office for the Preservation of Monuments*, following the reunification of Germany she advocated for the partial preservation of buildings from recent history, including the *Berlin Wall* and *the Palace of the Republic*. These structures were met with opposition from parts of the East German public and West German politicians. However, a generation later, their significance for ongoing public discourse has become evident.⁸

The Equestrian Statue of Bismarck in Bremen

Following the death of the former Imperial Chancellor Bismarck in 1898, a significant increase in the number of monuments erected in his honour was observed in Germany and its overseas territories. In Bremen, Franz Schütte, co-owner of the *German–American Petroleum Company* (which later became *ESSO*), requested the construction of a monument to Bismarck in proximity to the old town hall.⁹ A fundraising committee was established to collect donations. However, it took additional 12 years before the bronze equestrian statue, created by the artist Adolf von Hildebrand, was inaugurated in 1910. Since that time, the Chancellor has been positioned upright on a high base constructed from rough limestone blocks. He is depicted wearing a breastplate and mounted on a powerful horse. In lieu of a commander's baton, Bismarck is depicted holding a scroll of the constitution, symbolizing the founding of the empire (in German: “*Reich*”). The statue is the only one in Germany to depict Bismarck on horseback, and was situated in proximity to other equestrian statues of kings and generals in the vicinity of the market square.

The ambivalence of Bismarck's legacy and the colonialism he initiated is still palpable in Bremen today.¹⁰ Voices critical of the handling of *contaminated* monuments have become louder and louder in recent years.¹¹ On the other hand, it can be assumed that the *Otto von Bismarck Foundation*, founded in 1997 by former German Chancellor Helmut Kohl, has set itself the goal of honouring the statesman historically and critically in preserving his memory, which is also supported by local conservative circles.

In Bremen in 2000, an April Fool's campaign for an art exhibition, that gave Bismarck a knitted bib, a cap and a saddlecloth as the "Blue Rider", prompted a few angry letters from readers insinuating that the politician had been dishonoured.¹²

At the outset of the German "*Black Lives Matter*" discourse historian Christoph Cornelißen highlighted in the *Frankfurter Rundschau* that Bismarck also had other commendable qualities, and that – given his long-standing refusal to promote German colonialism – he was not an appropriate anti-colonial hate-figure.¹³ Currently, the press is more openly expressing concerns regarding Bismarck's pivotal role in establishing the German colonial empire and his promotion of militarism.¹⁴ This can also be attributed to an artistic intervention by the artist and exhibition curator Rainer Weber, who created a new approach to the memorial with a relatively simple installation, entitled "*At Eye Level*" (Auf Augenhöhe) (Fig. 1). For one week, by climbing a scaffold next to the monument, visitors could scan a QR code with their cell phone. This provided a bilingual audio guide with texts on Bismarck's colonial responsibil-

ity. A panel discussion was also scheduled to take place on a nearby stage, featuring activists, historians, and the author as the monument conservator. The event was well attended by a large number of people. As the action was only temporary and separate from the monument, it had no impact on the preservation of the monument.

Competition for the Redesign of the Bismarck Monument in Hamburg

The artistic competition, held to "recontextualize" the Bismarck Monument in Hamburg's Alter Elbpark between 2022 and 2023, demonstrates the challenges associated with finding an appropriate solution in terms of decolonial aesthetics.¹⁵ The monument had previously been extensively restored. For years, the base of the monument had been repeatedly covered in graffiti. If street art is seen as a form of protest, then after the restoration the neat appearance must have had an irritating effect on critical people.

The 34-metre-high statue was completed in 1906 as a giant *Roland* figure¹⁶ in accordance with the plans of architect Emil Schaudt and sculptor Hugo Lederer. The statue is supported by a substantial base comprising 100 granite blocks, making it the largest statue of Bismarck (Fig. 2).

The *Hamburg Office for the Preservation of Historical Monuments* had agreed to permit modifications to the monument's protected appearance on condition that the substance was protected and the measures were reversible.¹⁷ In the initial phase, the *Hamburg Historical Museums Foundation* conducted a series of workshops to gain a comprehensive understanding of the historical figure in all its complexity. In the second phase, a competition was held to attract artistic proposals. The third phase entailed evaluation of the results and forming a decision, but did not proceed as planned.¹⁸

A total of 78 submissions were received, but none were selected as the winning entry. Many of the designs were compelling in terms of their immediate content. For instance, Bismarck was reinterpreted as a tribal chief wearing an almost inconspicuous single-feather headdress¹⁹ or as Darth Vader from the Hollywood *Star Wars* trilogy²⁰; the "*Übermensch*" Bismarck was humanized with tears,²¹ or confronted with a tiny statue of his political opponent Ludwig Windhorst.²² Furthermore, designs were created for enclosures, information boards, anti-colonial counter-monuments, and additions as well as light projections and entire memorials. How-



Fig. 1: Action by the artist Rainer Weber at the Bismarck Monument in Bremen. The bronze monument was erected in 1910 based on a design by Adolf von Hildebrand (31 July 2024).

ever, the majority of the proposed contextualizations were deemed inappropriate as they would involve significant deterioration of the monument.

The former colonial memorial in Bremen.

Rededication and expansion of the memorial

In the period preceding the First World War, the decision was taken to create a central location to commemorate the “comrades of the Schutztruppen” who had lost their lives.²³ The project received the backing of the *Reich Colonial Office* and the *Reichstag*. The project was intended to be located on today’s *Bersarinplatz* in the Friedrichshain district of Berlin. Prior to the commencement of hostilities in 1914, the Munich-based sculptor Fritz Behn was selected through an artists’ competition to create a monument featuring an elephant on a pedestal.

Ultimately, the monument was instead installed in Bremen and, following a significant delay, was only completed between 1931 and 1932. (Fig. 3) In Bremen, there lingered a kind of residual unease among the Hanseatic merchants and the citizenry, who were predominantly national conservative. Despite opposition from left-wing parties, the project was only able to proceed due to the influence of moderate conservative parties on the “*commemoration of the fallen*”. The conservatives were supported by the National Socialists plus retired General Paul von Lettow-Vorbeck – former commander of the “*protection force*” for East Africa and, according to today’s interpretation, a war criminal – who lived in Bremen from 1923 until his death in 1964. A street in the Schwachhausen district was named in his honour.

However, Behn’s revised design is more aligned with the brick expressionism of Bernhard Hoetger.²⁴ The result was a 10-metre-high brick sculpture of an elephant on a basement-like crypt. An altar table displayed a book containing the names of the soldiers killed in the colonies. The inscription “*To Our Colonies*” was displayed above the entrance. At a formal opening ceremony on 6 July 1932, the Senate, Bremen Chambers of Commerce, the Imperial Navy, the Naval Officers’ Corps, North German Lloyd shipping company and the colonial and warriors’ associations all laid wreaths.²⁵

The National Socialists were able to leverage this imperial commemoration for their war plans. This was demonstrated once again in 1938, when the city sought to align itself with the National Socialist narrative by hosting a Reich Colonial Confer-



Fig. 2: Bismarck as the Hanseatic Roland in the Old Elbe Park in Hamburg. The almost 35-metre-high statue was erected between 1901 and 1906 according to plans by the architect Emil Schaudt and the sculptor Hugo Lederer (4 September 2023).

ence, thereby becoming known as the “City of the Colonies”.²⁶ This strategy was similar to that employed by other cities, such as Nuremberg, which became the “City of the Reich Party Rallies”, and Munich, which was designated the “Capital of the Movement”. Significant resources were invested in organising military parades and marches, which included veterans and soldiers, with a central event at Bremen’s Elephant Statue.

Following World War II, American military authorities ordered the removal of all inscriptions and emblems pertaining to Germany’s former colonies. It was not until the 1980s that a process of reappraising the city’s colonial history began in Bremen.²⁷ In 1986, Bremen became a member of the “*Cities Against Apartheid*” alliance.²⁸ Renewed engagement with the colonial monument was initiated through the renovation of the existing buildings. The city, as proprietor, sought to initiate renovation as early as 1987, when a critical Bremen anti-apartheid initiative stated in the daily press that it favored the monument’s preservation but rejected the concept of a “non-political restoration”. Ralf Fücks, a member



Fig. 3: Commemoration of the Battle of Ohamakari and the genocide in Namibia at the Anti-Colonial Memorial Elephant in Bremen. The monument was inaugurated in 1932 as a Reich Colonial Honour Monument based on a design by the sculptor Fritz Behn. In 2009, a memorial (foreground) made of stones from the Omaheke desert was added (11 August 2024).

of parliament from the Green Party, said: “Bremen cannot simply ignore its history. The colonial monument must be preserved as a stumbling block.”²⁹ The proposal included the installation of a memorial plaque and an artists’ competition. Following the completion of structural repairs, the sculpture was rededicated as an “anti-colonial memorial” on 18 May 1990 at a Namibia Freedom Festival (on Namibia’s independence from South Africa). The ceremony was attended by the Lord Mayor of Bremen, and a bronze plaque with a detailed inscription critical of colonialism and expressing regret was attached. Meanwhile, young trade unionists from IG Metall installed a steel plaque north of the elephant in support of human rights and against apartheid, depicting the silhouette of the African continent. Since that time, the crypt has hosted a series of exhibitions and events on colonial themes on an ongoing basis. In 1996, another bronze plaque was inaugurated in memory of the victims of German colonial rule in Namibia between 1884 and 1914, attended by the President of the Republic of Namibia, Sam Nujoma. In 2009, a memorial comprising stones from the Omaheke Desert was constructed in front of the elephant to honour the Nama and Ovaherero victims of colonial war in Namibia (1904–1908).³⁰ Since then, the genocidal warfare against the two peoples has been commemorated at this site annually on 11 August (the date of the Battle of the Waterberg in 1904).

The “Tanzania Park” Project in Hamburg-Jenfeld: The Ongoing Search for a Concept

When the Bundeswehr’s Lettow-Vorbeck barracks in Hamburg-Jenfeld finally closed in 1999, a small part of the historic buildings around the former “*Kleiner Exerzierplatz*” (small parade ground) was placed under a preservation order and partly given to public use. The rest of the 35-hectare site was demolished and redeveloped.

The barracks were inaugurated under the Nazis in 1935 with the participation of Bremen’s former “*Schutztruppen*” commander.³¹ Here and at two other sites, the military history of the former German colonies was to be honoured. For this reason, the buildings and barracks grounds were adorned with colonial revisionist architectural ornamentation and memorials until 1939. The buildings were decorated with ceramic relief portraits of individuals such as Hermann von Wissmann³², Paul von Lettow-Vorbeck and Lothar von Trotha³³ (colonial military commander) – today considered war criminals. The artist Walter von Ruckteschell created two large ceramic reliefs with racist themes for the gateway to the parade ground. The left panel depicts a carelessly marching platoon of African auxiliaries (known as *Askaris*) led by a local, while the right panel depicts a tightly marching platoon led by a German officer (Fig. 4). The depiction of “disorderly savages” supposedly *voluntarily* submitting to “civilization” under their German masters was entirely in keeping with the racist world view of the colonial revisionists, which the Nazis exploited in their propaganda.

The two large relief panels were apparently removed from their original location by a historical society shortly after the barracks was decommissioned, and stored.³⁴ However, another citizens’ initiative pursued a plan to create a small memorial, the so-called “Tanzania Park”, in a park-like open space. Supported by the city and the heritage authorities, the reliefs were reinstalled in a green space away from the original site. The lack of an informational context, such as explanatory panels and visual material, and the fact that the concept was developed without the involvement of Hamburg’s Black community, led to further resistance. The city took the criticism into account. Explanatory panels were installed, and in 2017 an interdisciplinary and city-wide “round table” was established with the Black and People of Colour communities, which discussed the conceptual ideas over several years. A consensus seems to have emerged to re-emphasize the spatial

connection with the former barracks and its controversial decoration. However, no further results appear to have been achieved.

In particular, the removal of the reliefs from their original location represents a clear break in the perception of the monument. This means that viewers are no longer able to intuitively grasp the spatial and therefore extremely impressive dimensions of the National Socialists' colonial revisionist propaganda in the context of the buildings. On the other hand, the objects may still be subject to political hostility and appropriation, such that the park and its objects are not freely accessible but placed behind a fence.

Conclusion

In view of the increasing demand for structural changes to monuments, it seems important to remember that monument preservation and protection only acquired their current significance with West Germany's fundamental social democratization and co-determination processes of the 1970s. The preservation of monuments was strengthened by numerous civil rights movements and initiatives in the early 1970s, which criticized the rigorous urban development of the post-war period.³⁵ This led to a wave of modern monument protection laws and the establishment of state monument offices in the Federal Republic of Germany around 1975, the European Architectural Heritage Year. In East Germany (as in almost all communist dictatorships), in addition to the call for freedom, democracy and environmental protection, the demand to preserve the cultural and historical heritage jeopardized by the communist image of history and the economy of scarcity, as well as the dilapidated old towns, played a significant role in the Peaceful Revolution.³⁶ Today's monument protection is thus an achievement of democracy resulting from civic commitment, and not a culture of remembrance decreed by the authorities" as portrayed by both the extreme left and right of the political spectrum.³⁷ Monument protection preserves visible historical sources, without which a debate runs the



Fig. 4: Right-side relief of the German East Africa Protection Force War Memorial by the sculptor Walter von Ruckteschell, relocated to the "Tanzania Park" in Hamburg-Jenfeld with explanatory plaques (17 January 2015).

risk of being conducted without public interest (e.g., among academics) from the outset. Monument protection is therefore much more than just a guarantor of identity-creation in public spaces for citizens.

The institutions committed to the protection and preservation of historical monuments may find themselves in a dilemma here. Against the backdrop of problematic culturalist constructions of identity in society (see above), there is a danger that the mediation of monuments will also come to nothing if too little attention is paid to the value of the dispute against the background of a pluralistic and democratic social order. Successful communication of history through monuments, also in an educational sense, requires a "bone of contention" or a contentious value, whether these are the Bismarck statues, bunkers from the National Socialist era, concentration camps and prisoner-of-war camps or Soviet victory monuments. The public handling of these controversial objects should lead to a critical, professional, and adequately equipped memorial education programme, because lively discourse is vital for a pluralistic democracy.

Figures

- 1 Achim Todenhöfer
- 2 Dirtscc (CC BY-SA 4.0 license)
- 3 Gudrun Eickelberg
- 4 Dirtscc (CC BY-SA 3.0 license)

Endnotes

- 1 Andrew M. Shanken, *The Everyday Life of Memorials*, New York 2022.
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- 4 Wikipedia, *German Reunification*, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/German_reunification
- 5 Ariella Aisha Azoulay, *Potential History. Unlearning Imperialism*, London/New York 2019, cited from Julian Sverre Bauer, Maja Figge, Lisa Großmann, and Wilma Lukatsch (Ed.), *Künste dekolonisieren – ästhetische Praktiken des Lernens und Verlernens*, Bielefeld 2023, p. 15.
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- 8 In this context, the exhibition “Hin und weg. Der Palast der Republik ist Gegenwart” at the Humboldt Forum in Berlin (from 17 May 2024 to 16 February 2025), which focussed on the complex conflicts surrounding the controversial architectural heritage of the second German dictatorship and the new self-image of the “Berlin Republic”. <https://www.humboldtforum.org/de/programm/laufzeitangebot/ausstellung/hin-und-weg-der-palast-der-republik-ist-gegenwart-116558/> (03/04/2025).
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- 18 Stiftung Historische Museen Hamburg 2023 (See note 15), p. 3.
- 19 *Ibid.*, p. 12–14.
- 20 *Ibid.*, p. 32–33.
- 21 *Ibid.*, p. 26–27.
- 22 *Ibid.*, p. 24–25. Ludwig Windthorst (1812 · 1891) was a politician of the Catholic Centre Party in the Kingdom of Hanover and was considered Bismarck’s intimate enemy. A parliamentarian for many years, he represented the federal interests of the German states annexed by Prussia in 1866 and Austria against Bismarck’s reactionary policies.

- 23 Heinz Gustafsson, *Namibia, Bremen und Deutschland. Ein steiniger Weg zur Freundschaft*, Delmenhorst/Berlin 2003, p. 303. Bismarck chose the euphemistic term 'Schutztruppen' (protection forces) for the protection of German colonial interests at the instigation of Hanseatic merchants such as Adolph Lüderitz (1834-1886).
- 24 The Munich sculptor Fritz Behn (1878-1970), a member of the German Colonial Society since 1911, was regarded as a specialist in African wildlife depictions. In Bremen, however, the sculptor Bernhard Hoetger (1874-1949) enjoyed great success with his Nordic-mythical expressionism, which culminated in the redesign of Böttcherstraße with the Atlantis building in 1930/31. Initially tolerated, Hoetger's art later fell out of favour with the Nazis as 'degenerate art', while Behn became the artistic darling of leading Nazis.
- 25 The Bremen Senate was dominated by national-conservative parties. Together with the NSDAP, they formed the majority in parliament. The driving force behind the establishment was the President of the Bremen Senate, Martin Donandt (1852-1937), a member of the German National People's Party (the DNVP). With the support of Paul Lettow-Vorbeck (1870-1964) - the former commander of the so-called Schutztruppe of Ost-Afrika (Occupation troops in what would later become Namibia), the trade associations and the conservative media, he pushed ahead with the project, despite opposition from the Social Democrats and Communists. Gustafson 2003 (See note 23), p. 319.
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- 31 Rosa Jung, *Postkoloniale Erinnerung. Zur Aushandlung des kulturellen Gedächtnisses am Beispiel der kolonialen Denkmalanlage auf dem Gelände der ehemaligen Lettow-Vorbeck-Kaserne in Hamburg-Jenfeld* (Bachelor-Thesis, Univ. Hamburg), Hamburg 2021, <https://fiona.uni-hamburg.de/0641fe3c/postkolonialeerinnerungfinal.pdf> (28.01.2025), here: p. 15–23.
- 32 Hermann von Wissmann (1853-1905), an African explorer born in Frankfurt (Oder), founded a private army to crush the resistance of the East African coastal population against the German East Africa Association (DOAG). He also took on missions for the Belgian King Leopold II (1835-1909) from the German aristocratic family of Saxe-Coburg and Gotha, who led a brutal repressive regime in the Congo.
- 33 Lothar von Trotha (1848-1920), who came from a Prussian officer's family, was commander of the occupying forces in German South-West Africa and responsible for the cruel genocide of the rebellious Herero people in 1904.
- 34 *Ibid.*, p. 18.
- 35 Dieter Martin, Michael Krautzberger et al. (Ed.), *Handbuch Denkmalschutz und Denkmalpflege. Recht, fachliche Grundsätze, Verfahren, Finanzierung*, München 2022, p. 47.
- 36 Among others: Nils Werner, «Friede den Bruchbuden, Krieg den Beton-Köpfen». *Wie Aktivisten die Altbauviertel der DDR retteten*, in: *MDR Geschichte* (12/03/2022), <https://www.mdr.de/geschichte/zeitgeschichte/gegenwart/politik-gesellschaft/stadtwende-in-mitteledeutschland-dresdner-neustadt-ddr-baupolitik-100.html> (28/01/2025).
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Perspectives on Coventry's Medieval Heritage since 1900 between Town Planning and Local Community Engagement

MARK WEBB

ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

Coventry ist heute vielleicht am besten bekannt als Stadt, die nach den schweren Zerstörungen des Zweiten Weltkriegs im Stil der Nachkriegsmoderne wiederaufgebaut wurde oder auch für ihr Wachstum in der Nachkriegszeit als Sitz der britischen Autoindustrie. Ihr reiches bauliches Erbe, das größtenteils aus der spätmittelalterlichen Blütezeit stammt, wurde bis vor kurzem übersehen, obwohl die Stadt noch vor weniger als 100 Jahren als wesentlich mittelalterlich geprägt bezeichnet werden konnte. Die Veränderungen begannen in der Zwischenkriegszeit mit der Einführung eines Straßenbahnsystems und neuer Straßen, die die engen mittelalterlichen Straßen durchschnitten. Die Wahl einer neuen Lokalregierung im Jahr 1937, die sich als Mandat für eine radikale Planungsagenda verstand, führte zu einer raschen Neuordnung der Stadt nach dem Zweiten Weltkrieg. Die lange Zeit vorherrschende Annahme, dass es einen Konsens zwischen der Stadtverwaltung und der Öffentlichkeit für die Veränderungen gab, basierend auf der hohen Besucherzahl bei einer Ausstellung im Jahr 1945, wird mittlerweile in Frage gestellt.

In Coventry haben viele Bürger das Gefühl, nicht in die Vorhaben der Stadtplanung einbezogen zu sein. Nach dem Zweiten Weltkrieg wurden in Coventry mehr mittelalterliche Gebäude zerstört als während der Bombardierungen während des Krieges, was zum Teil darauf zurückzuführen war, dass auf nationaler Ebene nicht genügend Mittel zur Verfügung standen, um schützenswerte Gebäude zu erhalten. Trotz der knappen Ressourcen lief es in anderen Städten anders. In Orten wie Southampton, wo die Stimmen der Denkmalpflege stärker waren, gab es auch eine stärkere Zusammenarbeit lokaler Behörden mit den Bürger*innen, um die Bedürfnisse der historischen Umwelt mit denen einer entstehenden modernen Stadt in Einklang zu bringen.

ABSTRACT

Coventry is perhaps best-known today as a leading example of a city reconstructed in a modernist style following extensive World War II damage and for its post-war growth as the home of the UK motor car industry. Its rich built heritage, largely from its late medieval heyday, has until recently been overlooked, yet less than 100 years ago the city could still be described as having a substantial medieval character. Few British cities have undergone such a transformation. The changes began in the inter-war period with the introduction of a tram system and new roads that cut across the narrow medieval streets. Early town planning schemes were delayed by opposition from traders and residents, but by the 1930s national government had given local authorities more powers to override local objections, and in Coventry an influx of workers from outside the city severely weakened civic opposition. The election of a new local government in 1937, with what it saw as a mandate for a radical planning agenda, led to the swift reordering of the city after World War II along modernist lines. The long-held view that there was consensus between the local authority and the public for the changes – based on high attendance at an exhibition in 1945 – has recently been challenged. The experience of Coventry is one of a feeling of powerlessness amongst many citizens; of having to go along with new plans imposed by more powerful forces; and of a well-meaning but stringent “we know best” municipal attitude. More medieval buildings were destroyed in Coventry following World War II than during the wartime bombings, partly due to a lack of resource at national level to assess buildings for protection or to police those buildings that were given listed status. Yet such an outcome was not inevitable in all of Britain's war-damaged cities. In places like Southampton, where the voices of heritage champions were stronger, the local authority accepted the value of cooperation with the local community in balancing the needs of the historic environment with those of an emerging modern city.

Introduction

Writing in 1908, local historian Mary Dormer Harris noted that, had the buildings been better maintained, Coventry would have been a match for medieval Nuremberg for the beauty of its medieval streets.¹ Around 800 drawings by Nathaniel Troughton dating from the mid-19th century show streets lined with timber-framed buildings, and many were still there as late as 1918–22 when painted by Sydney Bunney.² As late as 1933, J.B. Priestley wrote that Coventry was “genuinely old and picturesque. [...] you peer around a corner and see half-timbered and gabled houses that would do for the second act of *Meistersinger*”.³ Coventry's 14th- and 15th-century economic heyday as a major seller of wool and producer of woollen broadcloth was accompanied by perhaps the largest municipal building programme in provincial England. The city could boast the huge priory-cathedral of St Mary, the two enormous and impressive churches of St Michael and Holy Trinity, two friaries, several chapels and a magnificent guildhall, all surrounded by a strong and imposing circuit of walls and ditches. These monumental red sandstone constructions were complemented by the timber-framed buildings of the burgesses. But the *Dissolution* in the decade from 1538 (of the monasteries by King Henry VIII) and the closure of the cathedral-priory, guilds and chantry chapels after 1538 was the final nail in the coffin of an economy that was already in decline, and Coventry became a relative backwater for around 300 years.⁴ Even when the economy began to revive in the mid-19th century through the production of silk ribbon weaving, clocks, and watches, much manufacture was achieved in small, domestic ‘top shops’ rather than the large factories and mills that were appearing in other cities. Coventry also lacked the large civic buildings such as those that had recently emerged in nearby Birmingham, the new regional capital. Only when Coventry became the hub of Britain's bicycle industry in the 1880s, followed by the manufacture of motor cars, components and armaments after c. 1900, did factories and mills begin to appear amongst the medieval houses and streets.⁵ Coventry became Britain's fastest-growing city in the period up to the Second World War, and its medieval character was rapidly eroded.⁶

Early Debates on Coventry's Heritage

Access to the centre of the city via tram and motor car, through the city's narrow medieval streets,

was a key concern of Coventry's town planners. A 1910 proposal to create a wide thoroughfare from the north to the centre, cutting through existing medieval streets, was put to public consultation and roundly rejected by a ratio of 4 to 1.⁷ Despite the run-down nature of the city, Coventrians were still proud of their medieval heritage, and when a design for a new town hall was proposed, it was put to a competition, with public input. The winning design (built between 1913 and 1920) was an “early Tudor”-style red sandstone edifice in keeping with the medieval surroundings.

To the frustration of town planners, resistance by local people to early town planning schemes persisted until the 1930s. Coventry's local authority was not alone in feeling impatient with local opposition, and the national government decided to do something about it by introducing a Housing Act in 1930 that gave local authorities the powers to deal with poor housing and construct new roads without the need for public consultation.⁸ City Engineer Ernest Ford again revived the north–south road proposal, later known as Trinity Street, and the local authority stepped up its campaign to deal with poor housing. Many of these houses, condemned as “slums”, were timber-framed survivors of the 15th and 16th centuries, as drawn by Troughton.

Despite opposition from the local historical society, the *Coventry Guild and Museum Society*, and local traders, an entire district of timber-framed buildings near Holy Trinity Church was taken down in 1934–36. The “Butcher Row” area was part of Coventry's ancient market place and, had it survived, would have been a cultural attraction to rival York's Shambles. The destruction was described by the Historical Association in 1976 as an “appalling piece of municipal vandalism”.⁹ *The Society for Protection of Ancient Buildings* (SPAB)¹⁰ in particular was outraged and protested strongly to the municipality (the *Corporation of Coventry*), which brushed aside their objections – denying that the buildings included anything of historical interest; and claiming that, in any case, the Corporation should be allowed to proceed without outside interference.¹¹ The voices of opposition were drowned out by changing popular opinion in the city. Between 1931 and 1939, 42,000 migrants arrived, many from Ireland and Scotland, attracted by the high wages offered in the city's engineering and motor vehicle factories. There was less attachment to the city's heritage than before, and the

clearance of “slums” became a key campaign of the local press, which influenced opinion. Even the *Coventry Guild*, which had in 1936 changed from an antiquarian society to a civic society, declined to campaign against the changes.¹² Fig. 1 shows the packed streets around Butcher Row at the closing ceremony in January 1936.

Planning Schemes

The winds of change blew ever more strongly in 1937 when the local elections brought the Labour Party to power for the first time, with a sweeping reform agenda. Believing it had a popular working-class mandate for reform, the Council took on a robust policy to modernise the city. The new mayor was George Hodgkinson, a trades unionist influenced by the ideas of Le Corbusier and who had little interest in preserving Coventry's medieval built heritage.¹³ The Council's bold approach was reflected in the creation of a new Architecture department in 1938, one of the earliest in the country. Chosen as its

head was Donald Gibson, only 29 and with only one year's experience at the Isle of Ely. Gibson gathered around him like-minded architects influenced by the ideas of Le Corbusier and Lewis Mumford, with their dislike of the medieval city and dismissive attitude towards local consultation.¹⁴ A radical scheme with a new pedestrianised shopping centre, civic buildings and new zoning was produced. This would radically change the topography of the city centre, but the Council took the view that nothing should get in the way of its plans – a view shared by the local press.¹⁵ Work started in 1939 with the clearance of medieval housing in High Street to make way for a new museum and art gallery.

Coventry was famously badly damaged by war-time bombing, especially in 1940–41. This period was also the height of popularity nationally for radical town planning as a way to address social ills and start afresh once the war was over.¹⁶ National government initially took the view that bold post-war planning would be necessary, and invited lo-



Fig. 1: The closing ceremony of Great and Little Butcher Row (*Daily Mirror*, 2 January 1936).

cal authorities to submit plans for their approval. Funds would be given to 18 bomb-damaged cities, including Coventry, for compulsory purchase of the necessary land. Gibson realised that the widespread destruction of the city centre would serve to more quickly effect his plans.¹⁷

No-one seriously considered reconstructing Coventry as it had been before the war, as occurred in several Dutch, German and Polish cities.¹⁸ The biggest debate was over the future of St Michael's Cathedral, which had been reduced to a shell. There was no public consultation but a debate amongst architects, the bishopric and the local authority. Lord Alfred Herbert, a wealthy local industrialist, wanted the cathedral rebuilt as a replica. A proposal by the renowned architect Giles Gilbert Scott in 1944 to rebuild the cathedral to a new "medieval" design was rejected by both the bishop and the *Fine Arts Council*. Gradually, the cathedral ruins assumed the function of a memorial, associated with the city's message of peace and reconciliation. Plans to sweep

away the ruins were abandoned amongst a national sentiment that also protected a number of bombed-out churches in London, and a competition was launched in 1951 to build a new cathedral beside the ruins.¹⁹

The Gibson Plan, 1945–55

Urged by national government to consult more widely, the city council held an exhibition of its plans for the reconstruction of the city centre in October 1945, titled *Coventry of the Future*. Over a quarter of the city's population attended the exhibition, which was widely taken by both the Council and by post-war historians as approval for the schemes.²⁰ Yet, viewing the various panels and models versus positively approving them are two different things; moreover, the proposals were deliberately sketchy and made to look less alarming,²¹ and failed to cover what might happen to the city's surviving historic buildings. Photographs of the exhibition, available in Coventry's archives, show the polemical tone –



Fig. 2: Panel from the Coventry of the *Future* exhibition (1945).

with an emphasis on high-rise buildings, the lure of “mod cons” (modern conveniences) and a reflection of the “unplanned mess” of the medieval city²² (see Fig. 2). There was, in fact, opposition to the proposals recorded in the local press, with one commentator lamenting that the traditional character of the city would be “foreign” and would be “utterly spoilt” by the rigid lines of monotonous buildings.²³ An alternative plan put forward by Thomas Lloyd Humberstone, that would have retained a substantial amount of the city’s ancient housing stock, was ignored.²⁴

Recent studies have challenged the long-held view that there was a consensus between British post-war planners and citizens in 1945.²⁵ Yet the plan for Coventry went ahead anyway, even without positive approval from the citizens. There was a real sense of “we know best” and that the opportunity to achieve social change for the better should not be missed. Fredrick Smith, city clerk, who was responsible for liaising with the government on the city’s reconstruction plans, felt that saving all the city’s medieval buildings was not a realistic aim and that the citizens would be making a mistake if they failed to allow the planning experts get on with their task.²⁶ This was a view widely held amongst town planners in Britain at the time, despite a sharp drop in public enthusiasm for town planning in general.²⁷ Coventry’s situation was, however, unique. As one of the earliest British cities to be heavily bombed, it assumed the mantle as the “martyr city”. The eyes of Europe were on how Coventry would rebuild after the war, and mayor Hodgkinson and the Council played their cards well in overcoming government objections to the cost of the plan and to criticisms about the lack of public consultation. Despite government unease, the Gibson plan was allowed to go ahead.²⁸

By 1955 been, the Gibson plan was largely complete, but there had been very little organised opposition in the face of threats to Coventry’s much-loved medieval buildings. A series of oral histories given in 2000 by people who witnessed the changes reveal a wistfulness for what was lost. There was an overwhelming sense of having to go along with more powerful forces, mixed with disorientation amongst the building work, and yet a sense of excitement about what may lay ahead. Such helplessness in the face of stronger forces for change was felt in other towns.²⁹ Over 100 buildings were identified by an “*Antiquities Committee*” of self-appointed experts

in response to the national government’s requests for lists of buildings of historical and architectural importance that should be protected under the pending *Town & Country Planning Act* (1947). Most of them reflected monumental buildings from city’s medieval heyday but largely excluded Coventry’s traditional timber-framed domestic structures.³⁰ At national level, such groups of vernacular buildings were not considered to be important by the *Advisory Committee* set up to inform the new *Ministry of Town and Country Planning*. *National Buildings Record* secretary, Walter Godfrey, argued that more medieval vernacular buildings could be saved and indeed repurposed,³¹ but the views of architectural historian John Summerson won the day, partly because of the lack of resource to assess their value³² and partly because an understanding of the importance of such buildings as a method of adding to an “archive” of a city’s development was still in its infancy.³³ The prevailing wisdom was to retain important buildings in an “improved setting” rather than retain rows of buildings that although of lesser importance nevertheless added “character”. Summerson even doubted whether towns actually *had* a medieval “character” that was definable or capable of being saved.³⁴ The extent to which British cities could retain *character* was in fact debated amongst post-war town planners, and ultimately only 12 towns designated as “*historic*” (including Exeter, Warwick and York) were allowed to retain their narrow medieval streets of vernacular buildings more or less intact.³⁵ This decision by a small government-appointed Advisory Committee to limit the number of listed buildings for protection in 1947 arguably affected the future of Britain’s urban built heritage more than any other.³⁶ A small number of the more important medieval vernacular buildings were in fact highlighted as being worthy of attention, but it was left to local authorities to decide their fate, leaving hundreds, if not thousands, to be pulled down in the 1950s and ’60s. The stance that “the experts knew what was best” for the future of British cities was reflected in various top-down accounts of post-war reconstruction, many written by the town planners themselves. Published plans were often light on preserving historic buildings and often took the form of civic propaganda, sometimes allied to national morale-building.³⁷ Yet, recent studies have highlighted the extent of opposition to the changes, many of which have only recently emerged from the shadows.³⁸



Fig. 3: 169 Spon Street, c. 1400, restored in 1967.

In Coventry, countless vernacular buildings were therefore unprotected and the *Corporation* immediately demolished many of them after World War II – the loss almost certainly exceeded the number destroyed during the war itself. Even the *Antiquities Committee* was exasperated by the attitude of the *Corporation*, which took the view that even newly listed buildings such as early-16th-century Ford's Hospital or the fourteenth century Old Grammar School could be surplus to requirements if they stood in the way of a newly planned road or civic building.³⁹ The *Committee* secretary, A. Gardiner, resorted to appeals to the local and national press, an act that may have been vital in allowing many of Coventry's important buildings to survive to today. Even then, there was a feeling that such buildings had merely secured a "stay of execution" for another 20 years or so.

1955–64

When Gibson left for a new position as County Architect for Nottinghamshire, he was succeeded by Arthur Ling from *London County Council*. Ling was an ardent modernist, and swiftly put into practice a second phase of Coventry's post-war reconstruction that would prove to be even more destructive of Coventry's surviving heritage than the first. Gibson's

low-rise brick and travertine *Festival of Britain*-style buildings were now accompanied by high-rise and concrete modernist interventions. Perhaps the most radical part of Ling's plan was an "inner ring road", effectively a motorway that circled the outline of the medieval city.⁴⁰ Anticipating the changes, vernacular buildings expert Stanley Jones was sent in 1958 by the *Historic Buildings Council* to survey the city's surviving timber-framed buildings; he found and recorded over 100.⁴¹ Yet, when a similar survey was undertaken in 1964, following the construction of the first phase of the ring road, only 34 were found to have survived.⁴² Coventry's approach was now attracting major criticism from heritage bodies, including the *Historic Buildings Council*.⁴³

By the mid-1960s, the "group value" of heritage buildings was being finally appreciated – a shift from the prevailing view of the preceding 50 years, which had prized the best individual examples in an enhanced setting. The 1967 *Civic Amenities Act* allowed for the designation of "conservation areas" in which townscapes like Spon Street could be protected.⁴⁴ In a concession to heritage bodies and changing government attitudes to heritage protection, the *Council* agreed to an innovative but controversial scheme to save many of the timber framed buildings

that stood in the way of the *Corporation's* plans. They were to be dismantled, stored and then re-erected in medieval Spon Street to the west of the city, together with the city's largest group of *in situ* medieval buildings. The *Spon Street Townscape Scheme* was designed by architect Freddie Charles and finally completed in 1990.⁴⁵ Fig. 3 shows number 169 Spon Street, the first to be restored under the scheme. While individual buildings in other cities had occasionally been moved, nothing like it had been seen on this scale. The scheme attracted criticism from SPAB and other national bodies which, while they applauded the restoration of the *in situ* buildings, deplored the removal of buildings from other parts of the city.⁴⁶ SPAB even rescinded Charles' membership. Yet, the scheme won the approval of the local archaeological association, which took the view that at least the buildings would be saved rather than destroyed forever.⁴⁷ Spon Street continued to receive medieval buildings from elsewhere in the 1970s and 80s, such as a three-storey medieval merchants' house from Much Park Street, which was relocated to make way for new law courts. Such an elaborate building was incongruous in the setting of a medieval industrial suburb!⁴⁸

The Spon Street scheme was intended to be a kind of museum quarter for Coventry's medieval buildings, with the buildings utilised by independent businesses, yet it was only a partial success. While it had a curiosity value for tourists, the restorations were widely seen as overdone, almost fake.⁴⁹ Nevertheless, Charles' restorations, which stripped away all post-medieval features such as shop windows, were meticulously researched and contributed a great deal to emerging studies of vernacular building in the UK.

The public were not consulted about the Council's treatment of medieval buildings during the 1960s and 70s. Instead, it was left to individuals such as city archaeologist Charmian Woodfield and her architect husband Paul to raise concerns with government and the local press, highlighting the lack of resources provided under the current listing system to police against the destruction of ancient buildings.⁵⁰ Coventry may have been an extreme example, but it was not alone; other cities were destroying their archaeology and standing buildings to an alarming extent. The government's *Buchanan Report* (1963) warned that a compromise would be required between unfettered car access to town centres and maintaining historic buildings.⁵¹ In 1965,

the *Council for British Archaeology* undertook a survey of planned developments in 51 historic cities and highlighted the potential loss to historic standing buildings and archaeology. The results were published in 1972 in a landmark volume edited by Caroline Heighway, *The Erosion of History* (1972). In the foreword, leading archaeologist Martin Biddle suggested that all of England's archaeology and many of its standing buildings would be lost forever within a period of 20 years.⁵² The report was a wake-up call to many local authorities and, together with the OPEC oil crisis of 1973, it helped put a brake on further large-scale developments. By then the conservation movement was gaining ground, winning battles over historic buildings in cities like London and York. The voices of local people were finally being heard and the power of Britain's town planners was greatly reduced in the 1974 *Local Government Act*. Subsequently, local authorities were required to take account of local heritage and archaeology before committing to new developments, although this was not made law until 1990.⁵³ In Coventry, individual buildings remained under threat into the 1990s. *Black Swan Terrace*, a row of five mid-15th-century cottages in a former medieval suburb, was saved through the efforts of a local preservation society that managed to convey the importance of such rare poor man's medieval cottages, with their original timbers largely remaining.⁵⁴

Since the 1990s, the public have been much more involved in deciding the future of Coventry's historic buildings and the Council is much more aware of the value of retaining the city's built heritage alongside modern buildings. In particular, *Historic Coventry Trust* (HCT), which began as a preservation society to restore the 14th-century Charterhouse in 2011, has done much to draw attention to Coventry's surprisingly rich built heritage. HCT has taken over 22 buildings from the Council, and funds have been found to restore and provide them with a sustainable future. The restoration of St Mary's guildhall (2020–2022) and the 2023 opening of the Charterhouse to the public (thus fulfilling the bequest in 1940 of the last private owner, Colonel William Wyley, who wished that the house and grounds should be available to the people of Coventry) have added to Coventry's attractiveness as a tourist destination. Also, greater attention is now being paid to Coventry's rich surviving medieval art and material culture, including the early-16th-century Flemish tapestry in St Mary's Hall.⁵⁵

Conclusion

It was not inevitable that surviving historic buildings in British cities would be so extensively destroyed after World War II. Coventry's focus on reconstruction, often at the expense of its heritage, was not a position taken in all bomb-damaged cities. Much depended on a balance of power between an organised local preservation group and a local authority. Southampton, for example, adopted its Saxon and medieval past as part of its post-war identity, and the local authority worked closely with local heritage bodies, taking their views into account when pulling together their post-war plans. This included the sensitive re-routing of new thoroughfares to minimise impact on surviving medieval buildings and the opening of new archaeological museums.⁵⁶ Yet, local voices opposing rapid changes in many British cities were often ignored, especially in the 1960s when the prevailing orthodoxy was for modernist interventions.⁵⁷ One should also take account of changing attitudes towards conservation. Urban archaeology did not really emerge as a feature of British cities until after 1945, and in most cities until the 1960s. Even then, the focus was on Roman archaeology or medieval monumental buildings such as castles, walls and ecclesiastical buildings.⁵⁸ The vernacular medieval buildings that added so much to the character of British cities were not really understood or appreciated until the 1970s or later. With the benefit of hindsight, many cities are now realising that too much was conceded to the motor car and that many modernist buildings have detracted from rather than added to the urban landscape. Coventry, the "martyr

city", was perhaps a unique example of how a post-war urban reconstruction scheme could be imposed on its citizens by imbalance of power between an emboldened but well-meaning local authority determined on rapid improvements, against a somewhat bewildered local population "going along with" such changes in the absence of a local heritage champion or campaigning group. In towns like Leicester, attempts have been made to unpick and minimise the impact of modernist interventions of the 1960s and 70s and to highlight and bring together disparate heritage buildings through attractive pathways and green spaces. In other towns and cities, a number of post-World War II buildings have been dismantled only 40 or 50 years after being built, having themselves replaced medieval buildings that had stood for 500 years. Coventry, like other "industrial" cities is now, perhaps belatedly, appreciating its surviving built heritage and the associated economic and social benefits and the importance of "sense of place", especially in a youthful and diverse city like Coventry, are now understood. Above all, the importance of local consultation about the future of heritage buildings is now embedded in planning regulations and conventions and there is a recognition that the views of local people need to be married with expert opinion. This is a move back to the approach taken in Coventry at the start of the 20th century, albeit in vastly different circumstances, and a far cry from the "we know best" stance that Coventry's planners adopted from the 1930s well into the post- World War II period.

Figures

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Endnotes

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Arbeitskreis Theorie und Lehre der Denkmalpflege e.V.

About Us

The Association for Theory and Higher Education of Heritage Conservation is a society of academics and other professionals active in the field of heritage conservation at universities and colleges of applied sciences in Europe. In keeping with the interdisciplinary character of conservation work, the Group brings together representatives of a range of different areas, including architecture and building archaeology, history and art history, restoration sciences, landscape architecture, construction engineering, jurisprudence and urban planning, among others.

The Association's more than 140 members are drawn primarily from the German-speaking countries – in addition to Germany, also Austria, Switzerland and Luxemburg – but also from Italy, Belgium, the Netherlands, Great Britain, Slovakia, Croatia and Romania. Since the 1970s it has been dedicated to the exchange of ideas and experience on the theory and teaching of heritage conservation among colleagues at institutions of higher education. The Group sees itself as representing the interests of heritage professionals and as such is a member of the German National Committee for Monuments Protection (DNK).

Wir über uns

Der Arbeitskreis ist der Verband der Hochschullehrenden und anderer Fachleute, die auf dem Gebiet der Denkmalpflege an Universitäten und Fachhochschulen lehren und forschen. Dem interdisziplinären Charakter der Aufgaben in der Denkmalpflege folgend, sind darin unterschiedliche berufliche Fachrichtungen vertreten: Architektur und Bauforschung, Kunst-, Geschichts- und Restaurierungswissenschaft, Landschaftsarchitektur, Bauingenieurwesen, Rechtswissenschaft, Stadtplanung und andere.

Mit derzeit über 140 Mitgliedern – hauptsächlich aus den deutschsprachigen Ländern Deutschland, Österreich, Schweiz und Luxemburg, aber auch aus Italien, Belgien, den Niederlanden, Grossbritannien, der Slowakei, Kroatien, Rumänien und Estland – widmet sich der Arbeitskreis seit den 1970er Jahren dem kollegialen Erfahrungs- und Gedankenaustausch zur Theorie und Hochschullehre der Denkmalpflege. Er versteht sich als ein Vertreter für denkmalpflegerische Fachinteressen und sieht seine Aufgabe darin, neue Herausforderungen und Gefährdungen der denkmalpflegerischen Anliegen zu erörtern und dazu auch in der Öffentlichkeit Stellung zu beziehen. Die Jahrestagungen beschäftigen sich mit einem aktuellen Thema aus der Theoriediskussion der Denkmalpflege oder einem ausgewählten Denkmälerkomplex. Der Arbeitskreis ist Mitglied im Deutschen Nationalkomitee für Denkmalschutz (DNK).

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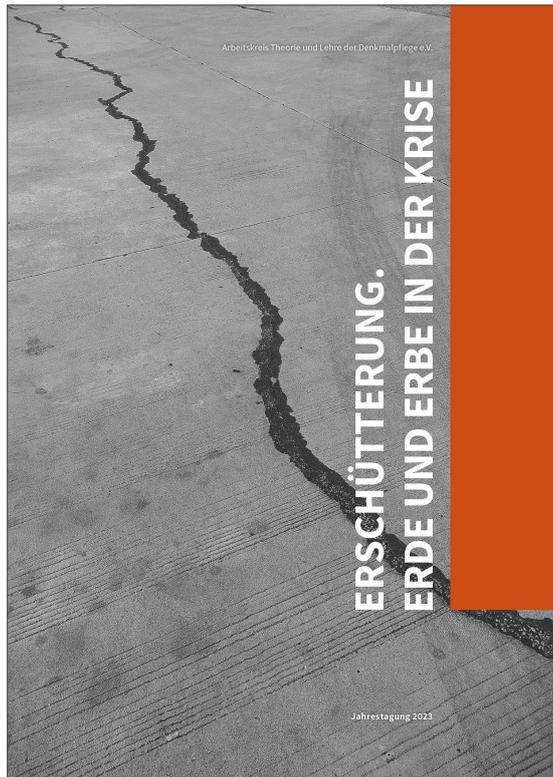
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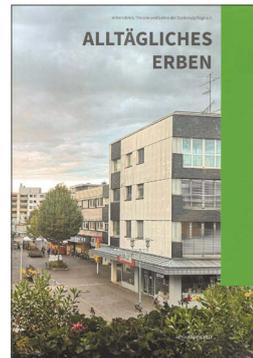
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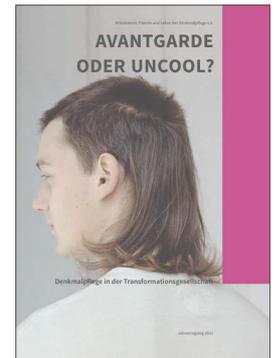


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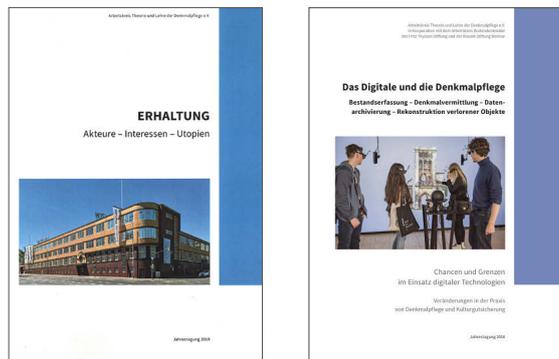


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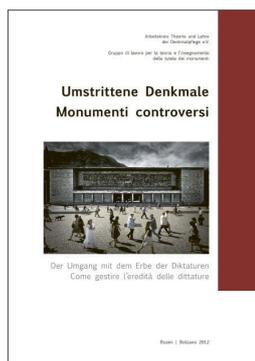
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Democracy is a fragile creature. So is cultural heritage. Heritage designation, interpretation and management are always affected by political circumstances. Democracy can take various forms, but the common thread is the emphasis on the empowerment of the people, the *Demos*, in shaping the policies and direction of the state. Whatever the approach taken towards heritage in democratic societies, it has to be subjected to the scrutiny of the public, and that includes a dialogue and discourse beyond heritage professionals. This raises the questions: Who defines, interprets, uses or instrumentalises heritage and for what purposes?

The publication on *Heritage and Democracy* is the outcome of an international conference in Coventry and brings together interdisciplinary perspectives on the topic, examining heritage under the categories of the *public good*, *civil society*, *politics* and *polity*. It gives voice to a wide range of authors with backgrounds in both democratic and non-democratic societies. We hope that their deliberations will spark further debates and initiatives ultimately with the aim of protecting both heritage and democracy.

Sabine Coady Schäbitz, Svenja Hönig

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und bei den Autorinnen und Autoren

Herausgeberinnen: Sabine Coady Schäbitz, Svenja Hönig

ISBN: 978-3-95954-188-6 (Druckausgabe)

Die Online-Version dieser Publikation

ist auf arthistoricum.net dauerhaft frei verfügbar (Open Access):

ISBN: 978-3-98501-369-2 (PDF)

URN: [urn:nbn:de:bsz:16-ahn-artbook-1649](http://nbn:de:bsz:16-ahn-artbook-1649)

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.11588/arthistoricum.1649>

eISSN: 2511-4298