Editorial

Editorial for the Special Issue "The Future of Built Heritage Conservation"

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The evolving role of built heritage in a rapidly changing world calls for a reconsideration of how we value, adapt, and protect our cultural heritage. This Special Issue of *Architecture* brings together a collection of diverse contributions that explore the complex interplay between heritage, conservation, and adaptation, considering how they inform our contemporary understanding of built heritage. The traditional understanding of heritage as tangible (physical) sites that represent authorised discourses and histories is being challenged by a postmodern conceptualisation of heritage as a dynamic and pluralistic process across space and time [1]. Together, the articles in this Special Issue provide critical insights into the future of built heritage, questioning the established methods and presenting new opportunities for more inclusive and sustainable practices.

Beginning with Laurajane Smith's established premise that "all heritage is intangible" [2], this Special Issue engages with expanding perspectives on critical heritage studies, intangible cultural heritage, contemporary conservation theory, and adaptive reuse. Evolving thinking across these themes highlights heritage as an immaterial, people-focused activity that can be constantly recreated, translated, and reborn [3]. This collection addresses the following questions: What is the relationship between the approaches to built heritage and the issues made prominent in critical heritage studies? How can architecture, conservation, and adaptive reuse strategies evolve to maintain relevance to the topical debates surrounding heritage in contemporary life? Additionally, contributions from neighbouring fields of inquiry—such as heritage management, archaeology, and cultural heritage studies—are also considered to reflect on the future directions within built heritage conservation.

Sally Stone's essay, "Notes towards a Definition of Adaptive Reuse" [Contribution 1], sets the tone by examining the evolution of adaptive reuse as a creative practice. Stone highlights how adaptive reuse transcends traditional architectural approaches, reimagining historic structures in ways that reflect contemporary cultural imperatives, such as sustainability and the focus on human experience over new construction. This emphasis on reuse and transformation forms the foundation for many of the subsequent discussions in this collection. Elizabeth Robson's article, "Assessing the Social Values of Built Heritage" [Contribution 2], explores how participatory methods can reveal the diverse and sometimes conflicting values that communities attribute to heritage sites. In focusing on Cables Wynd House in Edinburgh, Scotland, Robson demonstrates how built heritage can principally involve understanding the social significance that places hold for different community groups. Such approaches are essential for creating more people-centred, inclusive heritage conservation practices. In "Towards a Holistic Narration of Place", [Contribution 3] Youcao Ren and I delve into the complexities of conserving both natural and built elements at the Humble Administrator's Garden, China. Our research documents the tensions between the pressures of commercialisation and the need to maintain socio-cultural values, calling for more "holistic narration" that recognises both the tangible and intangible aspects of heritage. This theme of intangible cultural heritage is echoed in several contributions, such as Nigel Walter's exploration of the interplay between tangible and non-tangible heritage

in "Lost in Translation" [Contribution 4], which argues for an integrated understanding of heritage that moves beyond the traditional boundaries of conservation.

The urban context also plays a crucial role in this discussion. Camilla Mileto and Fernando Vegas López-Manzanares examine "The Protection of the Historic City" [Contribution 5], outlining the challenges in balancing the needs of contemporary urban development with the conservation of historic settings. This article demonstrates how a broader view of conservation that extends beyond individual monuments is better suited to considering their urban and social contexts. Mustapha El Moussaoui's study, "Spatial Transformation: The Importance of a Bottom-Up Approach in Creating Authentic Public Spaces" [Contribution 6], underscores the value of community-driven approaches in the transformation of urban spaces. By highlighting the role of phenomenology in urban design, El Moussaoui presents a compelling case for including community narratives in the creation of public spaces, emphasising that places are constructed with authenticity when designers work with, rather than for, the community.

In a different but related vein, Lui Tam explores the transformation of Guangrenwang Temple in China, highlighting the conflict between the authenticity of heritage and modern interventions in "A Controversial Make-Over of a 'Make-Believe' Heritage" [Contribution 7]. Tam's critical examination of the "Eastern/Western" dichotomies in heritage practice adds a nuanced perspective on the global challenges in heritage while also reflecting on the fluidity of the values in heritage amidst global influences. Mazin Al-Saffar's article, "Sustainable Urban Heritage: Assessing Baghdad's Historic Centre of Old Rusafa" [Contribution 8], tackles the intricate relationship between sustainability and heritage conservation in urban contexts marked by socio-political challenges. Al-Saffar presents a mixed-methodological approach to understanding the urban heritage of Baghdad, which emphasises the importance of adopting sustainable strategies for urban evolution that resonate with both historical preservation and future city-making. In their contribution, Teresa Cunha Ferreira and colleagues examine "Joint Management Plans in World Heritage Serial Nominations" [Contribution 9], with a focus on Álvaro Siza's architectural legacy. The discussion of joint management plans for World Heritage sites emphasises the significance of collaboration and shared responsibility in managing complex heritage sites, offering insights into the future of managing serial nominations as a rising trend in global heritage governance. Lastly, Ataa Alsalloum's "Building Home in Exile: The Role of Intangible Cultural Heritage, Crafts, and Material Culture Among Resettled Syrians in Liverpool" [Contribution 10] shifts our focus to heritage at the personal scale. Alsalloum examines how displaced Syrians in Liverpool, the UK, use intangible cultural heritage as a tool to create a sense of home, blending traditional crafts and practices with their new environments. This intimate portrayal of heritage speaks to the resilience of cultural identity and the role of intangible heritage in shaping a sense of belonging within the diaspora.

These contributions articulate an understanding of heritage that is increasingly multi-layered, dynamic, and inseparable from contemporary social, environmental, and cultural concerns. The future of how we engage with built heritage will no doubt move beyond a focus on material fabric and decay prevention towards a more fluid, adaptive, inclusive, and socially engaged approach that foregrounds the diverse values people imbue their physical environments with. This aligns with critical heritage discourse that regards heritage as a pluralistic, ongoing process—a social performance that reflects and (re)shapes community identities. The editor hopes that this Special Issue will inspire readers to actively engage in future-focused heritage processes, ensuring heritage continues to evolve, resonate, and thrive in our rapidly changing world.

List of Contributions

1. Stone, S. Notes towards a Definition of Adaptive Reuse. *Architecture* **2023**, *3*, 477–489. https://doi.org/10.3390/architecture3030026.
2. Robson, E. Assessing the Social Values of Built Heritage: Participatory Methods as Ways of Knowing. *Architecture* **2023**, *3*, 428–445. https://doi.org/10.3390/architecture3030023.
3. Ren, Y.; Djabarouti, J. Towards a Holistic Narration of Place: Conserving Natural and Built Heritage at the Humble Administrator's Garden, China. *Architecture* **2023**, *3*, 446–460. https://doi.org/10.3390/architecture3030024.
4. Walter, N. Lost in Translation: Tangible and Non-Tangible in Conservation. *Architecture* **2023**, *3*, 578–592. https://doi.org/10.3390/architecture3030031.
5. Mileto, C.; López-Manzanares, F.V. The Protection of the Historic City: The Case of the Surroundings of the Lonja de La Seda in Valencia (Spain), UNESCO World Heritage. *Architeture* **2023**, *3*, 596–626. https://doi.org/10.3390/architecture3040033.
6. El Moussaoui, M. Spatial Transformation—The Importance of a Bottom-Up Approach in Creating Authentic Public Spaces. *Architecture* **2023**, 4, 14–23. https://doi.org/10.3390/architecture4010002.
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8. Al-Saffar, M. Sustainable Urban Heritage: Assessing Baghdad's Historic Centre of Old Rusafa. *Architecture* **2024**, *4*, 571–593. https://doi.org/10.3390/architecture4030030.
9. Ferreira, T.C.; Freitas, P.M.; Cruz, T.T.; Mendonça, H. Joint Management Plans in World Heritage Serial Nominations: The Case of Álvaro Siza's Modern Contextualism Legacy. *Architecture* **2024**, *4*, 820–834. https://doi.org/10.3390/architecture4040043.
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References

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2. Smith, L. *All Heritage Is Intangible: Critical Studies and Museums*; Reinwardt Academy: Amsterdam, The Netherlands, 2011.
3. Fouseki, K. *Heritage Dynamics: Understanding and Adapting to Change in Diverse Heritage Contexts*; UCL Press: London, UK, 2022.