

## CHAPTER I

# Introduction: definition and development of conservation – the concept of authenticity

Heritage conservation is the discipline devoted to the preservation of cultural heritage for the future (Muñoz-Viñas 2005, 13). Heritage conservation emerged from a Western European world that had experienced the Protestant Reformation, the Catholic Counter-Reformation and the Enlightenment, and was based on a firm belief in science and rationality. Heritage conservation emerged and developed at the turn of the nineteenth century within the larger package of Western European modernity, identified by industrial capitalism, the nation state, rapid economic development, and a sense of human mastery over the natural world (Jokilehto 1995, 2021; 26–29; Cleere 1989, 1–2 and 7–8).

Authenticity emerged as the key concept of heritage conservation. The safeguarding of authenticity may be considered the quest for truth in the field of culture (Jokilehto and King 2001, 33). The importance of the concept of authenticity was formally established at an international level with the adoption of the *Venice Charter* (ICOMOS 1964) and especially the *Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage* (henceforth cited as the *World Heritage Convention*) (UNESCO 1972). In the context of the *World Heritage Convention*, authenticity may be seen as an ‘effort to ensure that those values are credibly or genuinely expressed by the attributes that carry those values’, and integrity as an ‘effort to refer to the completeness of the cultural heritage system which holds or contains those values’ respectively (Stovel 2004, 131). The *World Heritage Convention* (UNESCO 1972) and the accompanying *Operational Guidelines for the World Heritage Committee/for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention* (henceforth cited as *Operational Guidelines*)<sup>1</sup> (UNESCO 1977) concentrated on the ‘outstanding universal value’ of certain sites considered worthy of inscription on the *World Heritage List*, saw authenticity of the materials, in terms of ‘design, materials workmanship and setting’, as a key qualifying condition for the inscription of the sites on the List, and formed rigorous classification and measurement of inscription criteria and categories. The *Nara Document on Authenticity* (UNESCO 1994a; see also Larsen 1995) adopted a more dynamic understanding of authenticity based on

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<sup>1</sup> The *Operational Guidelines* were originally formed in 1977, and have gone through extensive revisions since then. In the text (mostly in Chapters 1.1 and 1.2), the version of the *Operational Guidelines* discussed each time appears in parentheses (eg. UNESCO 1977; 1984; 1992; 1996; 1999; 2005).

multiple aspects such as 'form and design, materials and substance, use and function, traditions and techniques, location and setting, and spirit and feeling, and other internal and external factors' (article 13), which was much later included in the *Operational Guidelines* (UNESCO 2005).

Authenticity is essentially a product of Western European cultural history (Lowenthal 1995, 125–127; Jokilehto 1995, 18–29; Titchen 1995; Titchen 1996); authenticity is not applicable or even existent, or existent but with a completely different meaning, in several non-Western cultures (Ito 1995, 34–35). Specifically, the Western European world has a feeling of dissatisfaction with the present caused by its rapid change and mobility experienced in the last centuries. This feeling of dissatisfaction has created a taste for the known, the familiar, the predictable, the expected, the repeatable, rather than the unexpected, the innovative. In this rapidly changing reality, the past affords a comfortable and controllable context, and is thus seen in a nostalgic way. The dissatisfaction with the present creates a strong desire or need to experience traces of an 'authentic', supposedly more fulfilling past, and repurchase and re-experience something untouched by the present. Authenticity is considered to be elsewhere: in other historical periods and other cultures, in purer simpler lifestyles and in a concern for nature (MacCannell 1999, 2–3; Lowenthal 1995, 122).

The discipline of heritage conservation has as its fundamental objective the preservation of physical heritage of the past from loss and depletion in the present. Thus, heritage conservation, formed and still operating in this context of dissatisfaction with the present, creates discontinuity between the monuments, considered to belong to the past, and the people and the social and cultural processes of the present/future (Ucko 1994, 261–263; Walderhaug Saetersdal 2000; Jones 2006, 122). In this way, 'conservation ... is a modern concept that sees the past as divorced from the present and existing self-consciously outside tradition' (Matero 2004, 69). This discontinuity created between the past and the present defines the main principles of conservation, such as the emphasis on the past and its tangible remains / the fabric, the notion that authenticity of heritage is non-'renewable' and the care for future generations. This discontinuity also defines the main practices of conservation regarding the fabric of heritage, such as those included in the *Athens* and *Venice Charters* (League of Nations 1931 and ICOMOS 1964 respectively): minimum intervention, respect for historic evidence, avoidance of falsification, preservation of the original, reversibility of interventions, compatibility of materials used in restoration, and the need to distinguish the original from the new material. It is this discontinuity that gives heritage authorities (mostly state-appointed), manned by conservation professionals, a dominant role in the conservation and management process of heritage, while defining the boundaries of their intervention. It is this discontinuity that generally

makes the discipline [of conservation]... such a difficult and crucial one, ...much more conscious and artificial than ever before, and still it seems that there is no other path which the responsible modern heritage manager can take... we [heritage managers] dare only, in the words of the Burra Charter, to do 'as much as necessary but as little as possible' to conserve the site as it now is. (Sullivan 2004, 50)

Furthermore, key characteristics of the World Heritage approach could be also put down to this discontinuity, such as: the concept of 'outstanding universal significance', the rigorous classification and measurement of listing criteria and categories, the separation between natural and cultural heritage, and the hierarchical character of the List ('splitting heritage into that which gets on the List – the minority – and that which is deemed not worthy of World Heritage status – the majority': Sullivan 2004, 50).

The Western European approach to conservation was then transferred, and even imposed, in other parts of the world, envisaging indigenous/non-Western cultures through Western eyes, in a broader context of colonialism. This led to the suppression and even breaking of the indigenous/

non-Western communities' associations with their heritage: the communities' (traditional) knowledge, management systems and maintenance practices were abolished, and the communities were physically removed from heritage places (Said 1978; Abu-Lughod 1989; Byrne 1991, 270–276; Layton 1989, 11; Bahrani 1998; Scham 2003, 173–176; De Cesari 2010; Meskell 2010, 192).

Given this discontinuity imposed by Western-based conservation between the past and the present, two main ways of seeking and safeguarding authenticity may be identified, which are phenomenally contradictory to each other. A first way is to preserve, 'freeze' a chosen - considered 'glorious' - past phase of a site, at the expense of the development of the life of the site in the present and the future. Emphasis is on the preservation of the fabric of the monuments, mostly of the initial phase of the history of the site, with negative consequences on the present local community's association with the site (Ucko 1994b, xviii; Lowenthal 1995, 130–131). An example of this is Stonehenge in the UK (a World Heritage Site), where heritage authorities 'attempt to 'freeze' the landscape as a palimpsest of past activity... [F]reezing time and space allows the landscape or monuments in it to be packaged, presented and turned into museum exhibits' (Bender 1999, 26). Another example is Great Zimbabwe in Zimbabwe, which since the settlement of the British in the nineteenth century and until approximately the early 1990s had been seen and preserved as an ancient medieval structure (built by a race considered superior to the country's indigenous population), at the expense of any other post-medieval phase of the site and at the expense of the present-day associations of the local indigenous people with the site (Ucko 1994a, 271–275; Ndoro 1994, 619–622; Ndoro and Pwiti 2001, 30–32; Ndoro 2001, 37–51; Pwiti 1994). A second way is to enliven a chosen past phase of a site, also with negative consequences upon the present local community's association with the site. This enlivening process is attempted through the imposition of contemporary interpretations, elements and processes upon the past, for example through reconstruction sites and recreation 'performances' (Ucko 2000). A characteristic example of a reconstruction site is the so-called *Great Zimbabwe Traditional Village*, constructed as a 'live museum' in the World Heritage Site of Great Zimbabwe in Zimbabwe, to be later relocated just outside the site (Ndoro and Pwiti 1997, 4–8), while a characteristic example of a recreation 'performance' is *Inti Raymi* (or *Sun Festivity*) that takes place in the site of Sacsayhuaman and in the World Heritage Site of Cusco in Peru (Ucko 2000, 67–68).

These two phenomenally contradictory ways of safeguarding authenticity are linked to each other, given that any attempt of preserving a site might be also considered a way to enliven it (Lowenthal 2000, 410). The linking of these two ways is often evident in the same site, as illustrated in the aforementioned case of Great Zimbabwe, and also in the site of Mystras in Greece (Poullos forthcoming; for further information on the history of Mystras see below). At Mystras, the first way of safeguarding authenticity, i.e. 'freezing' a chosen past phase at the expense of the present and the future, is reflected in the preservation and anastylosis of its Byzantine monuments, which were considered its 'glorious' and 'pristine' monuments. The preservation and anastylosis of the monuments were linked to a series of actions: The site came under the ownership of the State and under the management of the Antiquities Service. The remaining inhabitants of the site were removed from the site, lost their rights over the ownership of the site, and their architectural changes to the site were considered 'encroachments' and were removed. Finally, the site was inscribed on the UNESCO *World Heritage List* on the basis of the significance of the site as a testimony to a cultural tradition which has disappeared (inscription criterion iii) and the importance of the fabric of the monuments in the progress and evolution in human history (inscription criteria ii and iv). The second way of safeguarding authenticity, i.e. enlivening a chosen past phase of a site through the imposition of contemporary interpretations upon the past, is reflected in the following elements: a) the support on the part of the heritage authorities of the belief that the inaugural ceremony of Constantine Palaeologos (i.e. the last Byzantine Emperor, before the Fall of the city of Constantinople to the Ottomans in 1453) took place in the site of Mystras, despite

the historic evidence against it; and b) the support on the part of the heritage authorities of an annual religious-cultural-athletic celebration (the so-called 'Palaeologeans') to commemorate the inaugural ceremony of Constantine Palaeologos. This celebration encouraged the development of a strong symbolic connection of the broader local community with the site, in an awkward combination of nationalist and religious feelings and an indirect attempt to regain the lost glory. Therefore, as a consequence of the combination of these two ways of safeguarding authenticity, the local community's connection with the site was not only disrupted (in the context of 'freezing' a chosen past phase at the expense of the present and the future) but was also replaced by a new one of questionable historic validity (in the context of enlivening a chosen past phase of a site through the imposition of contemporary interpretations).

Despite the attempts of Western-based conservation to seek and preserve an authentic past within its own cultures and also within non-Western cultures, authenticity remains unattainable and 'chimerical' (Lowenthal 1992, 185; see also McBryde 1997). Preserving an authentic past is 'illusion', and actually brings the opposite result (Lowenthal 1985, 410).